

THE PADDLING ISSUE



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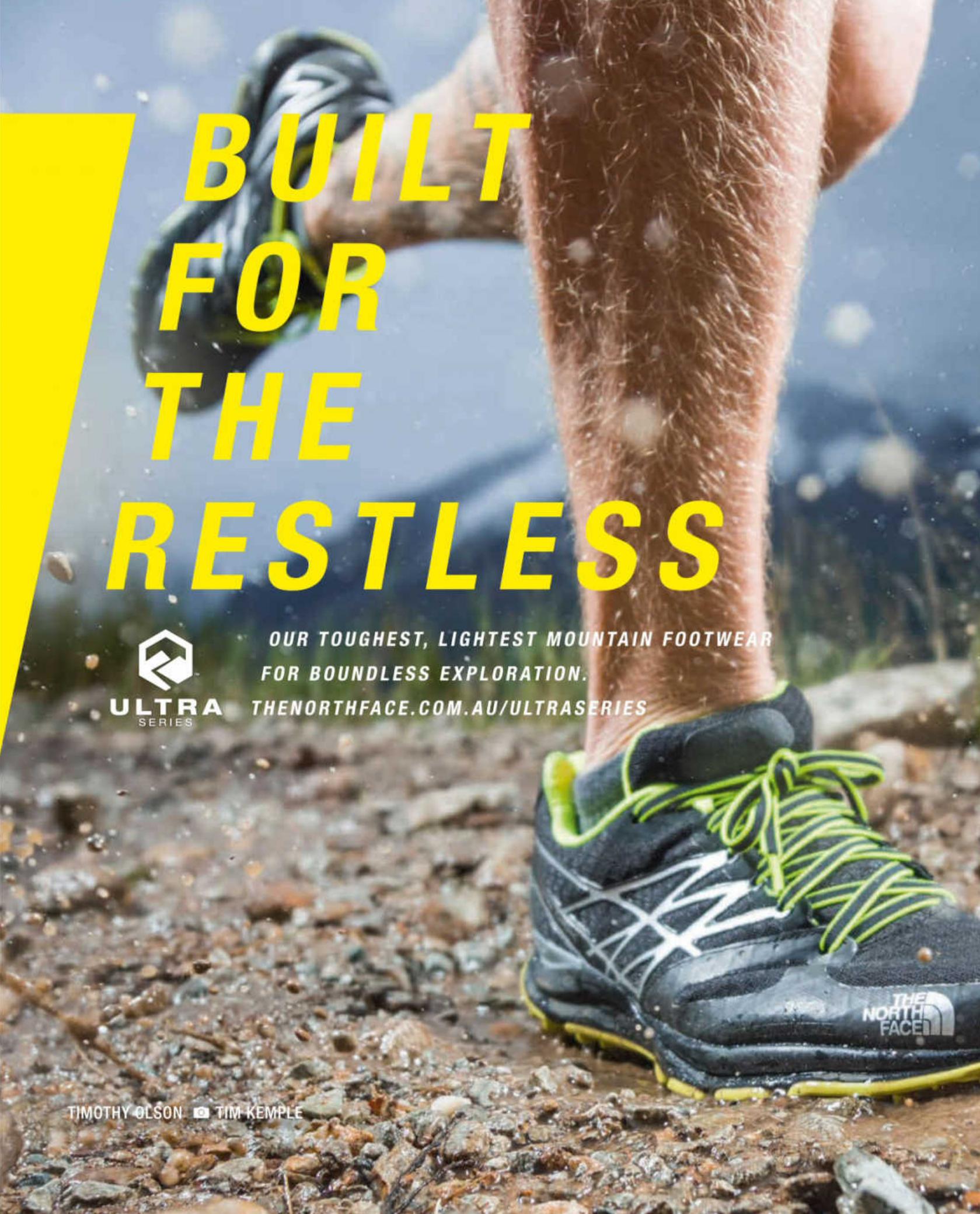
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THE PADDLING ISSUE

A PADDLER'S DREAM NEVER ENDS

YIELDING TO THE UNSTOPPABLE flow of a river's current or the ocean's tide is one of the best ways to fully reconnect with the great outdoors.

A paddling adventure, whether it is just for a day, a week or more, not only offers a unique chance to bond closely with our planet, but it also provides a chance to forge (or re-forge) relationships, introduce others to the joys of paddling and marine life, and share unforgettable and fantastic times. I have spent the majority of my life living on Australia's coast, enjoying much of my childhood at the beach and in the surf, with only a six-year hiatus out in the central west of NSW briefly breaking the coastal link during my formative years. Even then, rivers could be found.

It was during this time, funny enough, that I reckon my passion for paddling really grew. My father – a schoolteacher – built a fibreglass canoe (back in the days when fibreglass was still able to be used in public schools) that soon became the means to mine and my family's paddling end.

This lime-green and white canoe not only saw service in the central west's rivers and lakes – it was strapped to the roof of the family vehicle each summer as we headed "home" to our grandparents' coastal abode. The canoe was bloody heavy and awkward, but somehow my parents managed to

wrangle it onto the family car each year.

Of course I am not the only person who loves paddling – in all its disciplines. This issue is our dedicated paddling issue and, inside, you will find many inspirational stories about how paddling connects us with both the wild landscapes of the world (Ron Moon's guided trip down the Colorado River is a great example of this), our indigenous heritage (courtesy of Mark Watson's Ngaro Sea Trail experience in the Whitsunday Islands) and offers the chance to forge new memories with family, in the case of Pat Kinsella's brilliant canoe journey with his father.

And that old green and white canoe that my Dad built? Well, by the time you read this, it will have been dragged out of retirement (it is nearly 40 years old), had the spider webs and dust cleaned off, been transported down to the lake near my folks' place, and used to introduce my young children to the joys of paddling. And that will be another unique – and memorable – water adventure.



On the cover. The Ngaro Sea Trail, Whitsunday Islands.
// Mark Watson www.inciteimages.com

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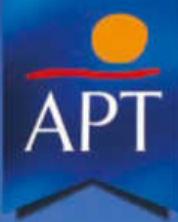
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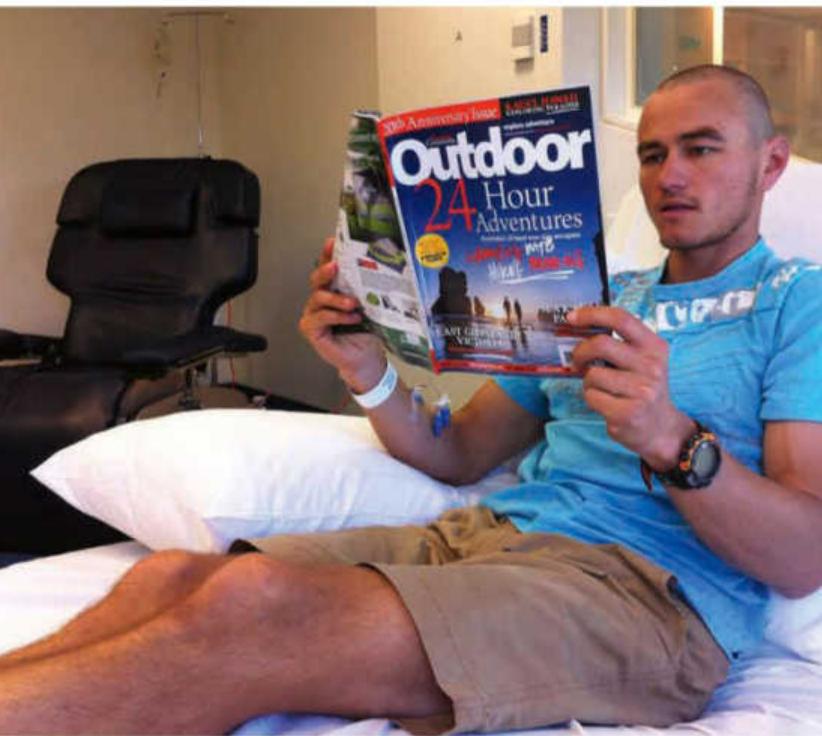
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GKAC15

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THE LONG WALK

I read with amazement the young lady's adventure walking the full distance of the Te Araroa Trail in New Zealand. It made this unfit, overweight former hiker have a good look at himself then set the goal of doing at least part of that 3000km trek in the very near future. A great, inspirational story – well done!

Trevor Sandrest, via email

TASMANIA LEADS THE WAY

I notice Tasmania has yet again trumped the other states. No sooner did I read about the fantastic (albeit slightly expensive) Three Capes Track being due to open in December, when I also saw that the Derby mountain bike trail network has been expanded yet again (and with more expansion to come in 2016). This small former mining town has successfully reinvented itself as a

tourist destination – our so-called "premier" state needs to wake up and take notice. There are many towns/regions that could benefit from the same sort of investment in NSW (and I am sure around Australia) but are held back by office-bound bureaucrats who wouldn't have a clue as to what a hiking or biking trail looks like.

Nathan Fields, NSW

GEARING UP

Just purchased AG Outdoor's annual Skills & Gear Guide. I must say, what a great mag – and exceptionally handy for this adventure newbie. Congrats on producing a fantastic "guidebook" that I will be keeping on my bookshelf for years to come as I explore all that the outdoors has to offer.

Kym Williams, VIC

LETTER OF THE ISSUE

I was diagnosed with non-hodgkin's lymphoma a month ago. I'm currently undergoing treatment at the Peter MacCallum Institute. My passion and occupation is all to do with the outdoors. Although the diagnosis has slowed me down, AG Outdoor has given me inspiration to get back out there doing what I love – camping, mtb, hiking and paddling. Whilst undergoing chemotherapy, reading AG Outdoor helps me stay positive and optimistic about my recovery back to the recreational pursuits I love. Thanks for

providing an inspirational magazine to get outdoors despite the challenging 'weather' people are experiencing in life

Tim Luszczak, via email

Congratulations and best wishes Tim, you've won an awesome The North Face Duffel bag (RRP\$170).



MTB Road Trip, NSW 4WD Cape York, QLD
Australian Geographic

Outdoor Xmas Gift Guide

Outdoor

Summer Bucket List!

explore adventure

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Swim NSW ocean pools Explore Kakadu
Hike Tassie's Three Capes Track

PLUS

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Our amazing northern neighbour

Te Araroa Trail
NEW ZEALAND'S LONGEST HIKE:

3000km

from the top of the North Island to the bottom of the South!

A woman is shown from the waist down, climbing a large, light-colored rock. She is wearing dark blue jeans and black Teva sandals. Her hands are gripping a horizontal rock ledge. The background consists of more rock formations.

Teva
19△84

The Ultimate Journey



NOBODY REALLY NEEDS any extra motivation to plan a trip to Everest, but Cancer Council Queensland have added a bloody good one, running a trek to Base Camp in 2016 as a fundraiser. They're hoping to raise more than \$40,000 for cancer research while sending a team on the 19 day trek that allows hikers to camp at Base Camp and explore the foot of the Khumbu ice fall.

The trek will be led by Sharon and Allan Cohrs, experienced mountain-climbers who became the first Australian-born couple to reach the summit of

Everest in 2011. Sharon was also the first breast cancer survivor in the world to make it to the top, after being diagnosed with the disease in 2007. They'll be leading trekkers to a height of 5550m above sea level, giving participants a chance to take in views of Everest, Lhotse, Nuptse and Ama Dablam.

The trip costs \$3295 (excluding airfares, insurance, visa and expenses), and includes time spent exploring Kathmandu, before flying to Lukla and setting out towards Base Camp. At Base Camp, participants will have the opportunity to visit with

the Himalayan Rescue Association clinic and learn about their volunteer work providing medical assistance to climbers, as well as meeting other climbers and touring the lower reaches of the ice fall.

It's an excellent opportunity for beginners, as the trek is non-technical and you don't require previous mountaineering experience to undertake it. You will need a decent level of fitness though, as most days involve 4-6 hours of trekking while carrying a 5kg day pack. The minimum age level for participants is 14, with parental consent. The trip runs from 24 April to 12 May, which means that the weather should be perfect for walking – though the nights up there can still get cold, especially during storms when the temperature can drop to -10. Trekkers can fundraise before, during and after the trip, and the money raised goes towards supporting cancer patients and education programs about prevention and early intervention, as well as funding research and clinical trials. For more information or to sign up, visit https://www.cancerqld.org.au/page/support_us/fundraise/the_ultimate_journey_for_a_cure/ or <http://www.everestone.com.au/#!cancer-council-queensland/cxsp>

– Lauren Smith

TEVA & **Outdoor**

"SPIRIT OF THE OUTDOORS" PHOTO COMP

A G Outdoor has joined forces with TEVA, the legendary adventure footwear company, to launch an exciting new photography competition, with cool TEVA prizes on offer each month.

To enter, all you have to do is upload your photos that reflect the "spirit of the outdoors" to Instagram, and tag "agoutdoor" in the Instagram photo. The photograph can be

anything that signifies the spirit of the outdoors to you; a beautiful campsite, amazing sunrise or sunset, a great rock climbing photo, your children (and/or yourself) having fun in the outdoors, or a memorable hiking, biking or paddling destination. At the end of each month, we will choose the best photo. The lucky winner will receive a pair of awesome TEVA sandals and the photo will be published in AG Outdoor.



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All-new Mountain Designs Pack and Bag Range

AG OUTDOORS WAS given a sneak peek of the exciting new pack and bag range from Mountain Designs. The range is a product of the all-new MD Product Innovation Team, headed by Mountain Designs CEO, Caroline Machado Campos. This team's focus is the development of new, innovative apparel and gear.

The range caters for a choice of end use needs – Travel, Active Trail, Adventure, Alpine and Everyday Outdoors – with features tweaked specifically to each use. Many of the packs have been designed with degrees of overlap, giving the range multi-functional use. To drive home the effectiveness of their design process, the MD Product Innovation Team surveyed more than 1000 pack users, collating insights into what features users wanted in their packs.

The Mountain Pony 30L and 20L packs are ideal day pack options, that can double as commuter bags. Made from tough 600D Oxford nylon fabric,



these packs are hydration compatible, include a bike-light attachment, front stretch pockets for food/water bottle storage, and daisy chains.

The Daintree Rucksack is available in 60L and 70L sizes and is designed for double-duty as a travel or hiking pack. Constructed from KODRA 500D fabric, the highly-specced Daintree includes a Hypalon patch (with removable trek pole attachment; there are also separate trek pole straps), compression straps, side pockets, removable lid, a front storage pocket (with daisy chain), dual entry, KODRA 1000-denier base fabric,

easy-slide sternum strap, adjustable padded harness (removable hip belt), and is hydration compatible.

The third example is the Jetset (in 65L and 75L). This suitcase (made from Cordura 315D Denier Textured Nylon and 840D Ballistic Nylon) features an internal Contour harness system, side compression straps, handles on the side/top, a shoulder strap, and a main compartment includes mesh dividers and zip pockets.

There are 30 packs in the range, which is due in store February. See www.mountaindesigns.com.

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Daniel Mathias/machaon-lights.com

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Clockwise from left Trekking in Nanda Devi, India; Kate Leeming will lead a great cycle adventure; Tim Macartney-Snape will take you to remote Nepal.



Awesome guides, awesome adventures

Australian adventure travel specialist, World Expeditions, has launched some amazing new trips, to be led by elite adventurers, into some of the world's most exciting and remote regions.

Two wheels high

Adventure cyclist Kate Leeming, who has cycled across Africa, Australia and the new Russia, will lead a new Trans-Himalayan cycling expedition in June next year, that traverses the West Himalaya. Freewheeling on the World's Highest Motorable Road: Cycle Leh to Manali is a 15-day expedition that will take experienced cyclists across a vast wilderness on the borderlands of Tibet, cycling the high passes that link Ladakh to the Kullu Valley and freewheeling from the Kardung La, the world's highest motorable road to the hill station of Manali. This amazing adventure departs June 25, 2016, from \$3,290 per person.

Intro to Indian trekking

Lonely Planet author Garry Weare has devised one of the finest introductions to trekking in the Indian Himalaya with his Nanda Devi Alpine Trek. This adventure includes walking ancient village trails through rhododendron forest, bamboo, meadows and Hindu settlements. You will experience

mountain views that extend to the Tibetan Plateau and the peak of Nanda Devi, India's highest peak. Nandi Devi Alpine Trek (20 days) departs 7 May and 24 September 2016, from \$3,990 per person.

Climb Peak Lenin

Mountaineering legend, Simon Yates, will lead adventurers in the 23-day Peak Lenin Mountaineering Expedition in July next year. Situated on the Tajikistan–Kyrgyzstan border, Peak Lenin stands at an altitude of 7,134 metres and is the second highest mountain in the Pamir range. This is an advanced mountaineering expedition and ideal for fit climbers with basic mountaineering skills and prior experience at high altitude who wish to tackle their first climb above 7000m. The Peak Lenin Mountaineering Expedition with Simon Yates departs July 2, and will set you back \$6,590 per person.

Go remote in Nepal

Tim Macartney-Snape is the guide on a remote

19-day Nepal Exploratory Trekking Expedition. A chance to tackle some real adventure, you will trek the remote trails south of Annapurna 3 and 4 and then towards Mardi Himal (5587m), a prominent peak directly under the summit of Machapuchare. Take in pristine trails and wilderness campsites in the company of the first Aussie to climb Everest. The adventure culminates with a climb of Mardi Himal – a superb introduction to climbing in the Himalaya. Mardi Himal (5587m) Exploratory with Tim Macartney-Snape departs November 15, and is priced from \$4,760 per person,

For more info on all these adventures see www.worldexpeditions.com or call 1300 720 000. If only us at AG Outdoor had the time to tackle a few of these!



Project Grovel – building an adventure bike on a budget

IT'S AN IDEA that's been floating around in my head for a couple of years now; build my own personal version of the ultimate budget touring bike, pick a destination, give myself a month and just... go and ride.

And to be honest, for me, it's always been more about the bike itself. I've been building up bikes for myself and my mates for the better

part of 20 years, and I'm still learning tricks and tips from those far smarter than me.

Having been focused on the racing side of the mountain bike fence for a while, it was very interesting to read about Curve Cycling's Jesse Carlsson's transition from out-and-out racer to ultra-distance competitor – and it flicked a switch for me.

Jesse, as you may have read a couple of issues back, recently won the Trans-America bike race, riding solo across the US on a bike he helped to create. To this mechanic's eyes, his titanium Curve Belgie is work of art – but it's not just a 'spare no expense' collection of parts. Jesse and the Curve guys approached the build in a no-nonsense way and with plenty of intelligence and insight. As

a result, he didn't even get a flat tyre on his way to victory.

A top-spec ti dream bike is a little out of reach but Curve's first frames were a limited run of cromoly rigs that it called the Grovel. Adam Lana from Curve tells us their customers have already covered some serious miles with their Grovels, including a 2700km epic through Japan, treks in India, Darwin to Cairns and more.

So, my plan is to grab a Grovel – thankfully for the budget, my size is on special! – and try and build it into a durable, easy to maintain, fun to ride rig for less than \$2500. It would be easy to spend into the threes and beyond, but I simply don't have that kind of money – and besides, I'm keen for a challenge!

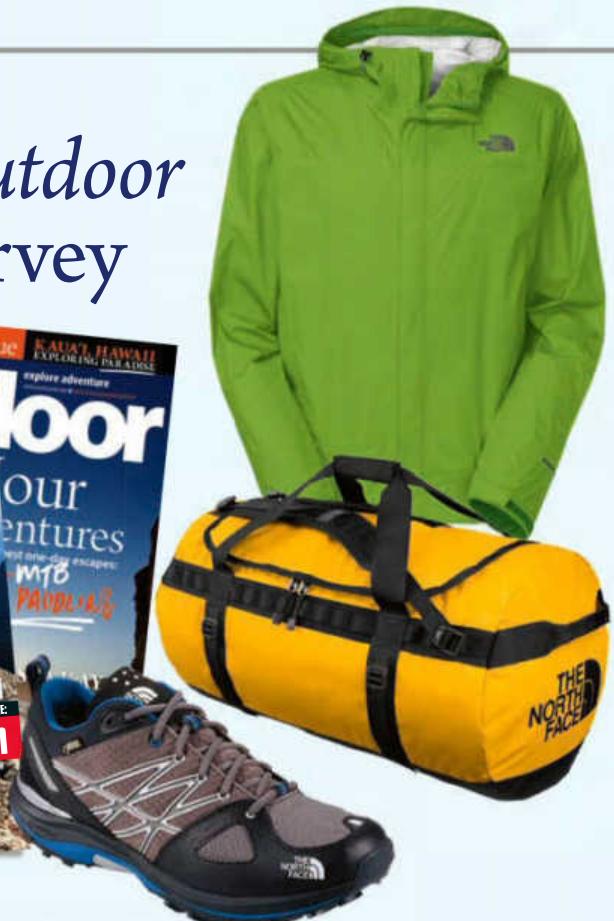
It'll take a few months to plan, acquire and build it, and I'll keep you updated through the mag as well as on Facebook. I can't wait to get started!

A large, dramatic photograph of a man standing on a rocky outcrop, looking out over a vast, rugged landscape. He is wearing a purple t-shirt, dark pants, and a tan bucket hat, and has a large tan backpack on his back. The landscape features rolling hills and mountains under a sky filled with heavy, grey clouds. In the bottom right corner of the image, there is a black rectangular logo for 'TASMANIAN MOUNTAIN GUIDES'. The logo features a circular compass rose with cardinal directions (N, S, E, W) and a central figure of a person riding a horse. Below the compass rose, the words 'TASMANIAN MOUNTAIN GUIDES' are written in a bold, sans-serif font.

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IT'S BEEN FIVE years since our last reader survey so Team AG Outdoor is super keen to hear your thoughts on the magazine, our website and our social media presence. We've asked some great questions in the survey as we are very interested in your feedback – it will make our great magazine even greater.

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Lofoten, Norway.

Camera: Nikon D810

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Shutter: 1/1000 sec

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Photographer: Tim Kemple





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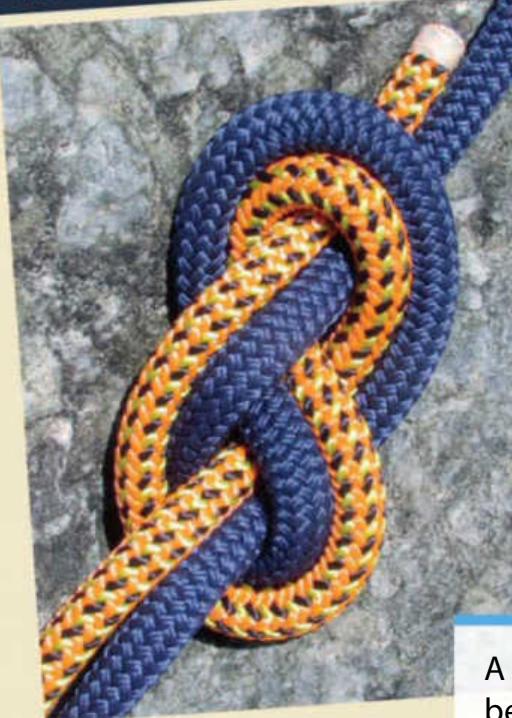
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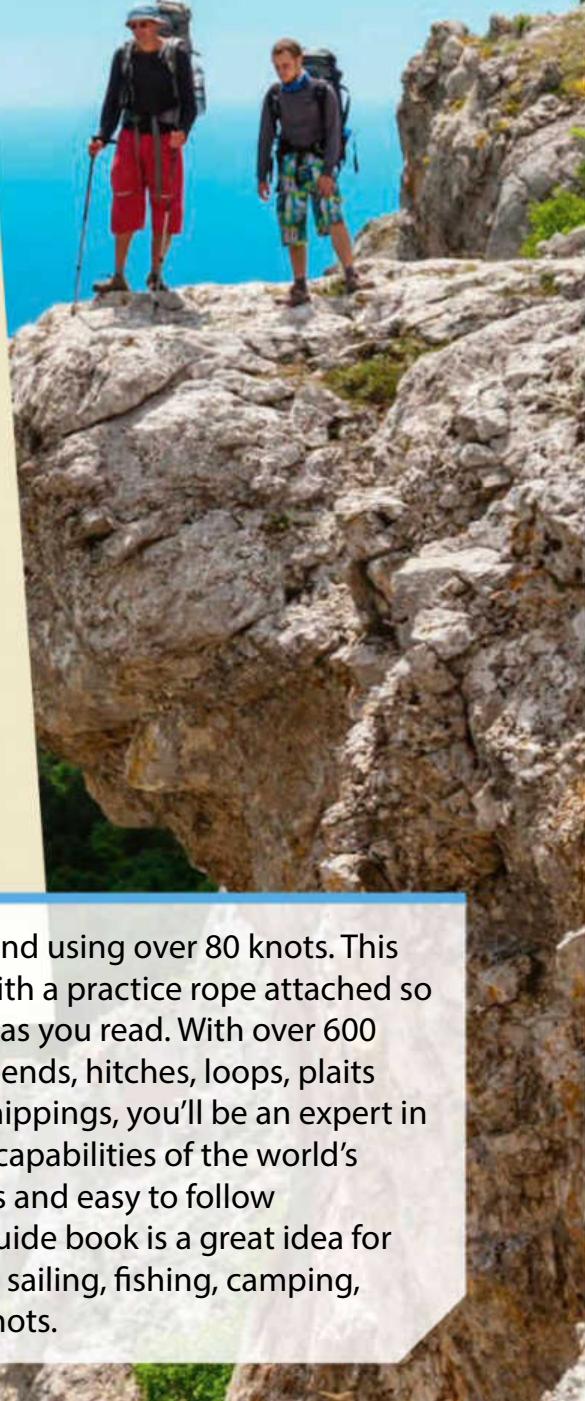
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THE
PADDLING 
ISSUE

NGARO DREAMING

Paddling the Whitsundays' Ngaro Sea Trail offers the opportunity to appreciate this spectacular seascape as it would have been many thousands of years ago.

WORDS & PHOTOS BY MARK
WATSON AND ALEX BORTOLI





IT IS ANOTHER cloudless day as I peer through the encrusted saltwater drops dotting my sunglasses. As I take another paddle stroke my blade connects with the ocean's confused golden surface and droplets sparkle and dance in the sunlight. Between my position and the silhouette of a lush tropical Queensland coast, waves roll through the deep channels.

Behind a sporadic tree line consisting tall hoop pines, a glimpse of calm water reveals Nara Inlet, our destination for the day, and we just make out a brahminy kite circling over spectacular and mesmerising rock formations formed over thousands of years of wind and waves.

The calm waters are still a way off as our team of four kayaks makes headway in the lee of Hook Island, one of more than one hundred islands and islets that form the Cumberland Group – the largest group of offshore islands in Australia.

The ocean's rhythm is hypnotic and I ponder whether the surrounding vista has changed much in the past 6000 years, when the rising waters at the end of the last ice age flooded the lowlands to create these islands. I contemplate whether the view was the same on 3 June, 1770 when a young Lieutenant James Cook sailed the *Endeavour* through this same passage

on the festival day of Whit Sunday. Cook also noted the tall hoop pines (good for ship repair) and the plethora of sheltered anchorages, and he proceeded to name the location Whitsunday Passage.

While Cook continued north, our small team of kayakers instead slows pace, for this is the final day of our journey tracing the Ngaro Sea Trail. It is the first day, however in which we have encountered any sizeable waves, and smiles abound as we surf the small wind swells that roll beneath us.

The sun beats down, warming our torsos as we laugh and heckle each other's attempts at running the swells. I notice a familiar sight out of the corner of my eye; a great green rock appears to rise from the ocean but the small, inquisitive head that rises from the glittering surface quickly reveals the true nature of the apparent floating boulder. A majestic

green sea turtle turns my way for a moment, and it's seemingly wise and knowledgeable eyes rest on me.

Maybe it is wary, knowing its ancestors were hunted by the seafaring Ngaro. Or maybe it is a juvenile, tripping from a natural high as a result of ingesting jellyfish toxin. (Yes, it is true!)

Apparently we are not interesting enough to retain the turtle's attention, and it banks away like a big old Lancaster bomber, diving toward the depths of the ocean where it may remain for up to five hours without surfacing. We press on to Nara Inlet.

Canyons to Kayaks

It was less than a week prior that I had turned up bleary eyed, straight from a canyoneering project in Utah, USA, to the headquarters of Salty Dog Sea Kayaking at Shute Harbour. Here I met fellow kayakers Stu, Kim, Marney and our guide Alex Bortoli.

Scattered on the carpark bitumen lay multicoloured dry bags, PFDs, tents, food bags, satellite phones and UHF radios amongst a smattering of the everyday essentials needed for a multiday kayaking expedition. Quick introductions revealed that whilst Alex admitted to years kayaking the Queensland Coast, he originally hailed from Bermuda and grew up in the Bermuda Triangle. Of course, the ribbing about whether we would ever return began immediately.

I was still suffering jetlag when it dawned on me that going MIA might not be all that far-fetched; our first overnight ➤





Clockwise from top left: Australia's premier paddling playground; a double sea kayak sets off from a beach launch to explore the islands; even the fauna is spectacular; a memorable beachside campsite.





camp was to be Dugong Beach in Cid Harbour on the western side of Whitsunday Island; a mere 20km as the crow flies, but most of it over open water running a reasonable wind swell.

"These guys are nuts," I began thinking to myself. "I'll die before we get a quarter of the way."

Fortunately Salty Dog owner Neil rounded the corner at that precise moment and pointed to an approaching boat *Scamper*. "There's your ride to camp one," he grinned, as he saw the relief wash over my face.

With kayaks loaded and gear piled high in *Scamper* we departed Australia's mainland in pursuit of our very own taste of the Ngaro Sea Trail.

A mere 10,000 years ago there would have been no need for aquatic craft and we simply could have walked to Whitsunday Island, however a melting icecap around 8000 years ago put an end to that. Like us (well, maybe not quite the same) the Ngaro people of the time had to adapt and it didn't take long for them to become expert maritime hunters and paddlers.

High atop the ridge of South Molle Island en route to camp one is evidence of such adaptation; a scar in the landscape reveals one of the largest pre-European stone quarries in Australia. It was here the Ngaro people fashioned stone tools they traded as far north as Townsville and as far south as Mackay. Such widespread distribution of the Ngaro wares suggests they rapidly surpassed their mainland relations in terms of maritime expertise, and as expert navigators they paddled huge distances between islands.

Interestingly, whether the Ngaro used outrigger canoes or the more traditional three-piece sewn bark canoes has been an ongoing debate amongst academics and historians for many years. Research now suggests the Ngaro probably used both, with evidence from Cook's log noting, "On a sandy beach upon one of the islands we saw two people and a canoe with an outrigger that appeared both larger and differently built to any we had seen upon the coast."

Garden of Eden

Arriving at Dugong Beach Campsite, we offload the kayaks and stores before rapidly setting up camp. From the campsite, only metres up the beach, small schools of baitfish are visible sheltering close to the shore, while beyond the shallows the fine silica particles in the water scatter and reflect light to offer a visual bombardment of brilliant and vivid tones of aquamarine.

With not a cloud in the sky, the water beckons us, and so rather than a short walk to Sawmill Beach, we load into the kayaks. Kim and Marney team up in the double kayak, whilst Alex, Stu and myself settle into the singles, and soon we are gliding across the calm waters of Cid Harbour, the occasional turtle head bobbing and breaking the surface, but alas, no dugongs.

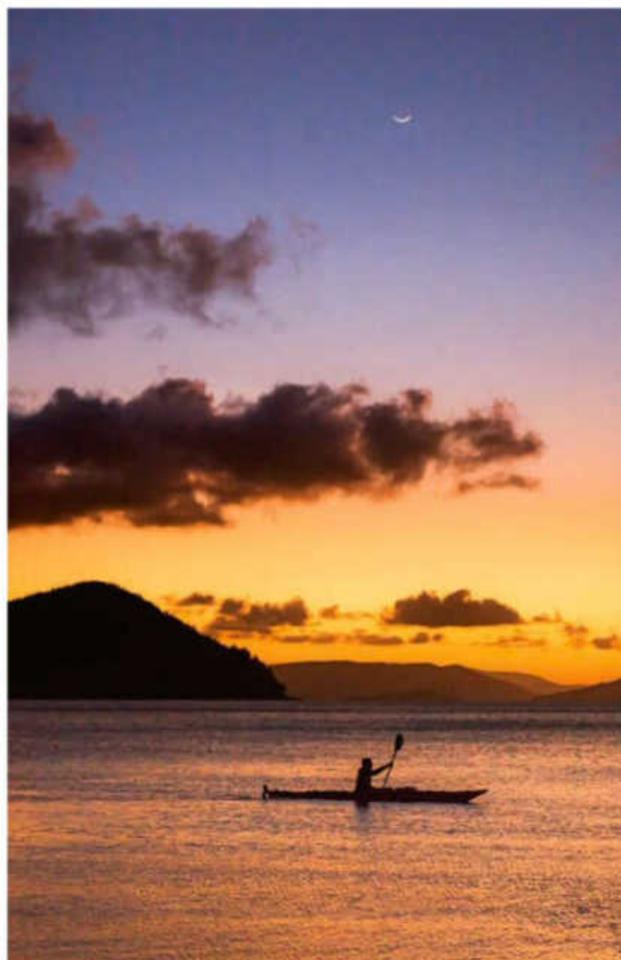
As we paddle, Alex explains it was not only Captain Cook and the Aboriginal people who embraced the deep sheltered

With not a cloud in the sky, the water beckons us, and so... we load into the kayaks.



Clockwise from top left: the Whitsundays definition of threading the needle; sunset doesn't mean you have to stop paddling here; the beach landscapes vary; local wildlife is inquisitive rather than frightened.





natural harbours of the Whitsundays. In fact, in 1942 the entire Pacific Fleet used Cid Harbour as a staging area prior to the Battle of the Coral Sea. From outriggers to tall ships to warships, the maritime history of the Whitsundays is astounding.

From the beach, a steep trail heads up to the 435m Whitsunday Peak, and peering along the dark trail leading onto the thick vine forest, thousands of blue tiger butterflies can be seen fluttering in the dappled light.

Following the rocky bed of a stream, we soon come across standing fresh water, evidence of the water source that drew the Ngaro to live here.

Such an environment was a veritable Garden of Eden for the Ngaro, who used the resin from the giant hoop pines to seal canoes and fix spearheads. They also made spears from hardened grass tree shafts, wove baskets from the leaves, made sweet nectar drinks from the flowers and ate the soft crowns as a vegetarian delicacy.

Following the trail through this Eden is a bit of a sweat-fest, but the view from the top makes it all worthwhile, as does cooling off amongst the coral reef surrounding Orchid Rock and the mesmerising paddle home on a sea of molten gold.

Pulling our kayaks ashore at camp we are welcomed by a white-bellied sea eagle high above, and enormous lace monitors wandering camp. Tuna and mackerel leap from the water as we eat our fill and peer into the darkness, where a Proserpine rock wallaby tentatively peers back at us.

Our first day in Paradise has been a good-un.

Sounds in the Night

As day two of our inter-island adventure dawns, the rustling of the night gives way to the singing of birds and whooshing of waves. Peering from my tent I notice a movement in the undergrowth; a small mouse hops out of a hollow log, scurrying around looking for food, and vanishes in an instant when it sees me. I step barefoot onto the sand wondering whether the early hours leaf-litter party that woke me had been this little guy and his mates, but then I notice a discrepancy; where Alex's brilliant yellow tent once stood now stands an orange and red polka-dot dome.

As Alex emerges and looks at his roof, he groans in apparent understanding. He had inadvertently set up camp under a damson fruit tree, which is a favourite with the local fruit bats. While the Ngaro used to use the bark of this tree to poison fish, the previous night the fruit bats had gorged on it, in turn dripping the juices and berries all over Alex's tent.

A hot cup of tea soon melts Alex's 'tap,tap,tap' nightmares away and breakfast in paradise charges our team for our intended day of paddling Whitehaven Beach and Hill Inlet.

In our bid to cover as much water as possible we hitch another ride with *Scamper* and dump our gear at our overnight camp. Ideally this leg would be a nice paddle but unfortunately we all have commitments back home, and still have much to see, with an exploration of Whitehaven on the must-do list.

With its brilliant white beaches and cerulean waters, Whitehaven is a picture of nirvana, as enticing to the hardened adventurer as it is to the sarong-clad tourists who flock here from nearby island resorts – but it was not always such. Each squeaking footfall on the powder-like sand leaves a small imprint in the remnants of a once violent volcanic past. ➤

The view from below is nearly as nice as that from above the water.



A sea turtle grazes slowly along the ocean floor.



A mere 100 million years ago (or thereabouts) when New Zealand chose to tear itself away from Australia, the split caused massive upheaval and volcanoes spewed out millions of cubic metres of silica rich magma. That same magma eroded over many millennium and was eventually washed by sea currents and sculpted by wind to become the largest silicic large igneous province in the world... or in layman's terms, a brilliant beach of 99 per cent white silica sand.

I find myself a little shutter-happy and spend most of the day photographing (including hitching a ride in a helicopter) while the rest of the crew get stuck into 15 gruelling kilometres of paddling to the northern end of the beach and Tongue Point, before returning, close to broken.

I rejoin them midway back to camp and I can see the long day has taken its toll. As we silently contour the small breakers, the dark shadows of common stingrays glide beneath our kayaks, and the water surrounding us turns to glass as we

An inquisitive green sea turtle cruises into our cove... and on reaching camp we find the usual lace monitors hanging around.

quietly steer towards home.

Alex and I detour to a rumoured coral garden off Hazelwood Island 1.5km from camp, and the extra paddle has our muscles threatening to cramp, but a quick underwater exploration proves the rumours true, and the brilliant blue, green and purple soft and hard corals make the trip well worth the effort.

As we eventually glide back to camp we are once again inundated by wildlife. An inquisitive green sea turtle cruises into our cove where we bathe, and on reaching our camp we find the usual lace monitors hanging around and looking on casually.

It is dinnertime when the real show begins with wallabies peering in from the tree line before 'mission impossumble' makes a dramatic entrance.

Sneaking up behind Alex and Marney towards our dinner, an acrobatic possum then makes a daring climb up Marney's leg before launching onto our table and burgling some dinner. Marney ends up in Alex's lap and the wry possum seems to wink at us before making a dash for the trees. We cannot help but laugh at the bold intruder as we double secure our food for the night.

Hamper Scamper

Three days in and we are becoming quite acquainted with good ole *Scamper* as we once again hitch a ride to the most remote island campsite of Whitsunday Cairn. Yet again, with time on your side, this would be a nice paddle with a halfway stop at Peta Bay, but once again we have our wishlist and time constraints to abide by.

We arrive at Whitsunday Cairn in time to tackle a slightly overgrown and ridiculously steep bush track for the 1.5km hike to the top. At the summit is a 360 degree view of the surrounding islands and we marvel at the spectacular vista laid out before us.

On soaking up the view, we rush down past scrub ebony trees, whose fruits turn from green to red when seeds covered with a brown pulpy sweet flesh ripen enough to eat. There are no ripe berries on hand but fortunately Hayley from Salty Dog has sent a bundle of treats aboard *Scamper* for our last afternoon out and we scoff on olives, dips and flatbread with cheese and salami before spending the afternoon exploring the coral gardens and enjoying a last night in this opulent wilderness.

Full Circle

We leave camp early in the morning to avoid the weather but it is slowly catching up with us. Our crossing of Hook Passage is uneventful bar the sighting of some feral goats wandering the shore at Fossil Beach, but the wind has continued to strengthen and for the first time in the trip we need to affix our spray decks.

NGARO SEA TRAIL, THE WHITSUNDAYS, QLD | ADVENTURE



After 10km of paddling, we near the end of our journey and while the sky remains clear, the wind continues to strengthen and we are relieved to enter the sheltered waters of Nara Inlet. It is here that the largest population of the Ngaro once lived due to its sheltered position and permanent freshwater source.

As we skim along the abstract rock formations lining the shore, we spy shell middens and ochre paintings on the caves and rocks overlooking the water.

According to University of Southern Queensland archaeologist Professor Bryce Barker (an expert on Ngaro culture), some of the caves show occupation stretching back almost 9000 years! This is “the oldest (aboriginal) site discovered in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and one of the oldest sites so far discovered on the East coast of Australia”.

Professor Barker says the Ngaro were not only expert navigators and maritime hunters but they also developed new technologies like the detachable, barbed harpoon point, which meant they could hunt larger animals like dugong, giant turtles (weighing 150kg-plus) and even small whales.

In Nara Inlet we finally come to the end-point of our trip and walk up to the cave paintings where a solar-powered speaker box eerily projects the voices of descendants of the Ngaro, telling the story of their people.

Through these days of following the sea trail I have learnt just how resilient and resourceful the Ngaro were in an ever-changing world, but I feel somewhat disheartened knowing that the history of the Ngaro is rather a sad story. For all their skills and seamanship, resourcefulness and knowledge, the Ngaro eventually fell victim to an ever-growing colonial settlement. Their peaceful and amicable relationship with passing boats failed when white pioneers began arriving with intent to stay. Fierce resistance led to the deaths of a dozen settlers and a number of ships were set alight, and the peaceful times were over.

By the early 1920s enough European disease and slave trading for the pearl industry resulted in the decimation of the Ngaro population.

This is a part of our history we must never forget and whilst I am saddened to learn of it, I am also thankful that I have experienced a small part of the Ngaro world and have had the opportunity to appreciate the majesty of their environment.

Over the past four days I am gladdened to have paddled alongside the turtles and jumping mackerel, to have slept alongside lace monitors and Proserpine rock wallabies, and to have ever so briefly touched on a world today that’s much as it would have been thousands of years ago.

AGO travelled with Salty Dog Kayak in Shute Harbour, Airlie Beach, Queensland, Australia, +61 7 4946 1388, www.saltydog.com.au

A huge thank you to Alex Bortoli not only for guiding our motley crew of kayakers but for being an encyclopedia of local knowledge and for researching and providing information for this article.

THE ESSENTIALS

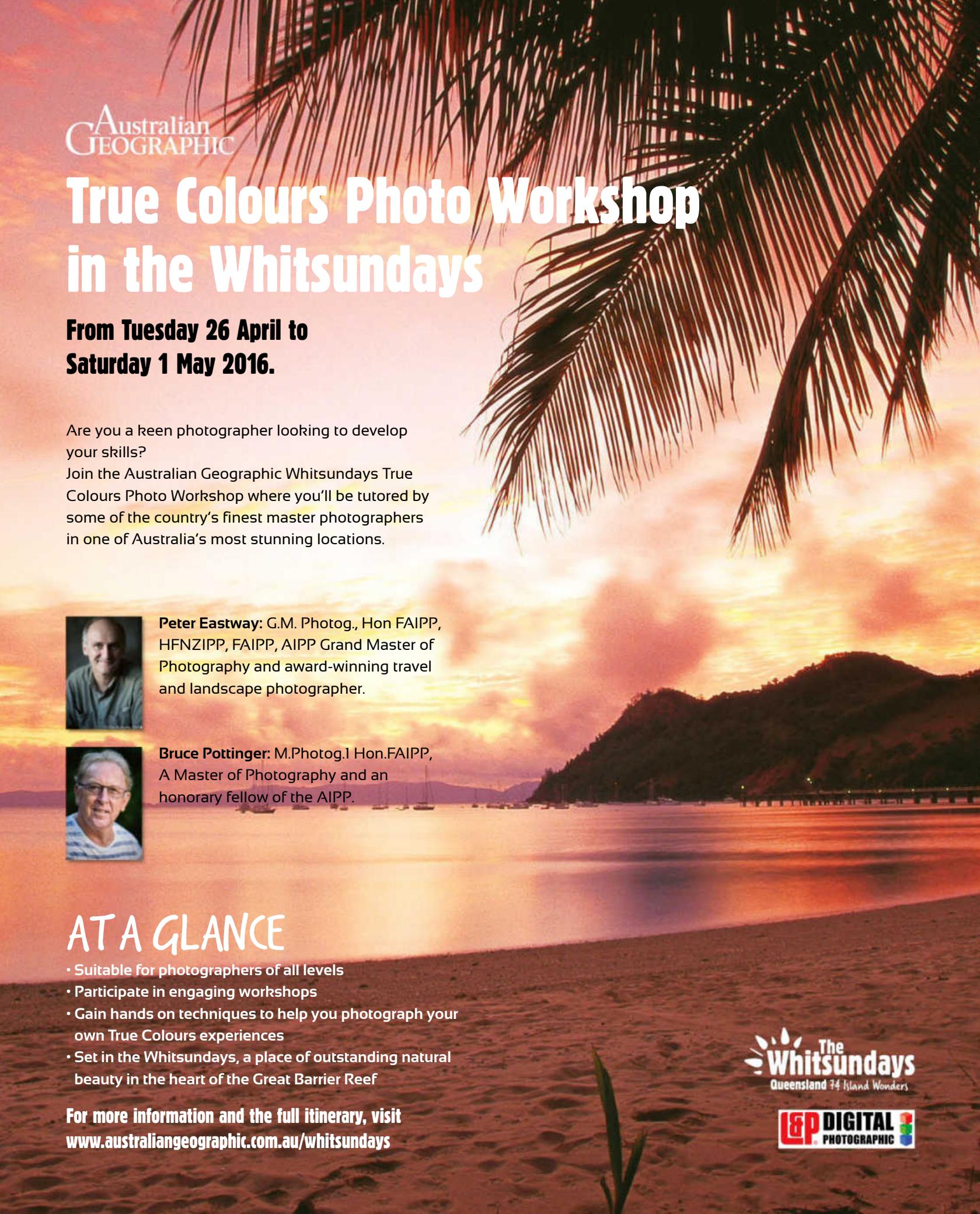
Where: Whitsunday Coast, Airlie Beach, Queensland, Australia.

When: Best times to visit are from May to September, prior to the wet season.

Getting there: Both Virgin Australia and Qantas fly to Hamilton Island and Virgin and Jetstar fly to Proserpine, Whitsundays Coast Airport. There is a regular ferry between Hamilton Island, Daydream Island and Airlie Beach. Salty Dog runs *Scamper*, an inter-island shuttle service.

Where to stay: Pre- and post-tour, there are a plethora of options from backpacker accommodation to five-star resorts at Airlie Beach.

Must haves: Long-sleeve sun shirt, sunglasses and sunglasses keeper, waterproof camera, water bottle, insect repellent, stinger suit, snorkel and mask.



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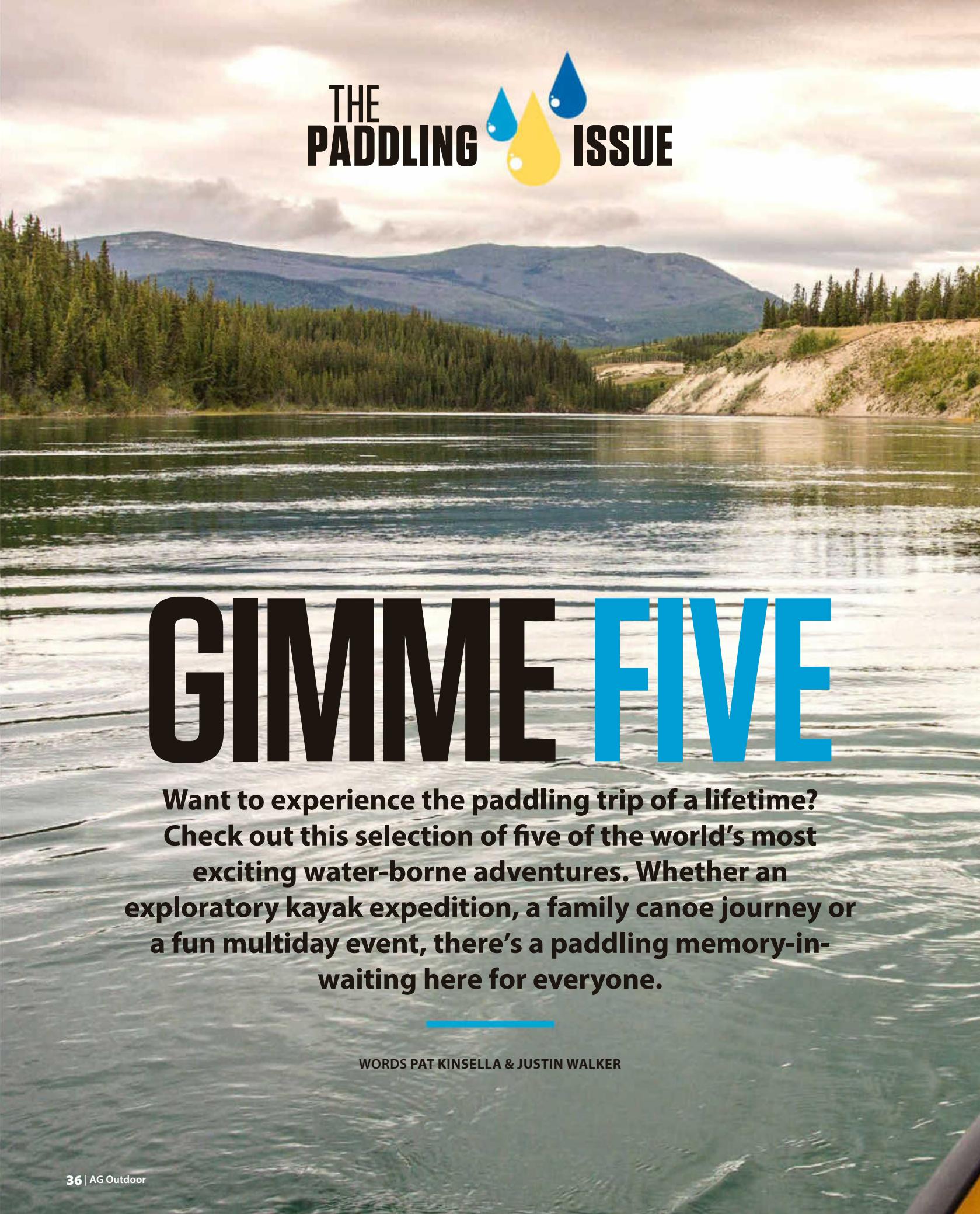
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THE PADDLING ISSUE

GIMME FIVE

Want to experience the paddling trip of a lifetime? Check out this selection of five of the world's most exciting water-borne adventures. Whether an exploratory kayak expedition, a family canoe journey or a fun multiday event, there's a paddling memory-in-waiting here for everyone.

WORDS PAT KINSELLA & JUSTIN WALKER

TOP FIVE PADDLING TRIPS | ADVENTURE



The Yukon River is a bucket-list trip for all paddlers, whether hardcore racers or those after a more serene journey.



HAIDA GWAII, BC, CANADA

Start: Sandspit (guided)

Finish: Sandspit

Recommended time: Eight days for an exploration of the southern region; 14 days-plus for the full monty

More info: www.pc.gc.ca; www.kingfisher.ca

A BRILLIANT ISLAND-HOPPING sea kayak adventure that packs every single thing you may desire – wildlife, First Nations culture, a pristine marine environment and sublime camping and fishing are all on offer in one of the world's premier paddling destinations: Haida Gwaii.

Also known as the Prince Edward Islands, this archipelago sits just off the northern coast of Canada's British Columbia. Contained within the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Maritime Conservation Area Reserve and Haida Heritage Site, the islands are home to the Haida First Nations people, and also to a massive array of marine and wildlife.

It's for good reason Haida Gwaii is referred to as Canada's Galapagos; whether it is whales, massive seabird colonies (and raptors, such as the bald eagle), dolphins, fish species (including the ubiquitous salmon), unique marine life or black bears, you will spot them all from your sea kayak. And even the bears are different here: the Haida Gwaii black bears are accounted as the largest of their type, due to there being no competition (in the form of grizzly bears), and also due to the fact the islands cop no real winter, so the bears do not have to hibernate and thus don't lose much weight. They also possess overly large jaws, which have evolved to accommodate their primary food source: intertidal marine creatures – namely shellfish.

So how about the paddling? Well, in among all the gawking at the natural highlights, you will paddle between campsites on relatively sheltered coastal waterways, with only a few sections of open ocean paddling as you head south (on this suggested journey) from Kat Island, past a few Haida historical sites (including the magical Tanu and its remnants of a Haida village) before reaching your southernmost destination: the island of SGang Gwaay Llnagaay, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This is the site of the last Haida village in the south of Haida Gwaii to be abandoned. There are still remnants of longhouses and other buildings here, but it's most famous for its many carved memorial and mortuary poles. The resident Haida Watchmen offer guided trips and it is a definite must-do.

Over the course of eight days (or longer if you have more time) of paddling you will be fully immersed in a simply wonderful world. Potential highlights of this extraordinary paddling adventure include sitting in your kayak as whales feed not more than 100 metres from you, paddling through the marine life-rich Burnaby Narrows, experiencing the rich culture of the Haida First Nations people, being mock-dived at by bald eagles, landing on shore at the end of a day's paddle to be confronted by a rather large bear on that same beach and camping in ancient forests right near the Pacific Ocean.



THE GREAT GLEN WAY, SCOTLAND

Start: Fort William

Finish: Inverness

Recommending time: Three days plus

More info: www.greatglenway.com; www.visitscotland.com

THERE'S SOMETHING super special about a coast-to-coast adventure, but that feeling is accentuated even more when the route you're taking follows a liquid line – especially when the water being crossed includes a Highland loch known the world over for its resident monster.

The Great Glen was declared Scotland's first official canoe trail in 2012, but the waterway it follows dates back a wee bit further. Roughly 450 million years further, to be exact, to a geologically violent age when a fault line ripped Scotland in half, creating a chain of connected inland seas: Loch Lochy, Loch Oich, Loch Ness and Loch Dochfour.

Wild rivers naturally link these lochs – and experienced canoeists and kayakers regularly run their rapid-riddled length – but in the early 19th century, engineering genius Thomas Telford joined the deep dark dots with the Caledonian Canal, making it possible for larger boats (and less skilled paddlers) to travel from one side of Scotland to the other.

You can paddle in either direction, but most people follow gravity and the prevailing wind, and start in the west, in Banavie, near Fort William, where a series of eight lock gates keep the saltwater of the Atlantic out. From there, it's all downhill (sort of) until you're spat out into the North Sea at Inverness.

In between those two points, you must navigate 96km of water. Although some of this is along a manmade channel – some definitely isn't. The crux lies in the negotiation of the lochs, particularly the 37km-long, 230-metre deep Loch Ness, which can be scary even if you don't believe in monsters.

Wind-whipped waves can often get up to two-metres high here. Indeed, there's speculation that sudden waves have played their part in creating the monster myth (as random rollers can look a lot like humps in the water), which dates back to 565 AD.

In the right conditions, though, this is a spectacular paddle. The entire route takes three to four days, and there are campsites along the way, and portaging facilities around the locks. Wild camping is permitted on the shores of the lochs – along with campfires, so long as you adhere to the principles of the Scottish Outdoor Code and apply Leave No Trace ethics.

The banks of the lochs boast numerous historical ruins and buildings, including Urquhart Castle on Loch Ness, which dates back to 1296, and 17th-century Invergarry Castle on Loch Oich, close to the Well of the Seven Heads (named after a particularly gory story from Scotland's past). And there's an option for those who want to run the rapids on the wild rivers, one at the end of Loch Oich and another from Dochgarroch into Inverness.



CLARENCE RIVER CANOE & KAYAK TRAIL, NSW

Start: The Junction, Nymboida-Binderay NP

Finish: Copmanhurst

Recommended time: Eight days (weather/water-level contingent)

More info: www.myclarencevalley.com.au

HIdden in the high hills of the NSW North Coast hinterland is the start-point for one of Australia's best canoe adventures: the Clarence River Canoe & Kayak Trail. This seven-day journey (if time is an issue, you can put in further downriver for shorter trips) is suited to relatively experienced paddlers and comprises a near-perfect mix of whitewater and flatwater, brilliant wildlife-spotting opportunities (including the chance to see platypus) and excellent riverside campsites.

The Clarence River Canoe & Kayak Trail is comprised of three famous rivers – the Nymboida, the Mann and the Clarence. The trail starts from The Junction campground in Nymboida-Binderay National Park and follows a northerly direction for most of its length, before looping back to the southeast at the

confluence of the Mann and Clarence, and then on to the finish at the township of Copmanhurst. Along the way, those paddlers who tackle this journey will encounter sections of rapids, flat water and a few waterfalls (these have to be portaged). And they will have the opportunity to camp at some very well set-up campgrounds that offer facilities ranging from basic bush camping through to full amenities (including showers and toilets), right on the banks of the river.

There are many highlights along this exciting route including the chance to run challenging rapids, but you can also take it easy and float slowly along the flatter sections and keep an eye out for the abundant wildlife in the region. This combination – whitewater, wildlife, great fishing and sublime camping – is what we reckon makes this seven-day journey so appealing, and is complemented by the fantastic sense of remoteness you'll also experience along this paddling trail.

There are many accessible put-in points along the route as well, so if you haven't got the time for the full-monty trip, you can always tick it off over a few separate visits. The flatter sections (around Lilydale Riverside Camping Reserve or at Copmanhurst) are also ideal parts of the trail in which to introduce children to the delights of canoeing. A day's paddling on the Clarence River, followed by a night under the stars spotting local wildlife, is every young paddler's dream adventure. This well set-up paddle destination is the perfect place to start them on their life of water-borne adventure.



FRANKLIN RIVER, TAS

Start: Collingwood Bridge

Finish: Strahan

Recommended time: Nine days

More info: www.worldexpeditions.com

FROM THE MOMENT you put in with your raft on the Collingwood River (a short distance away from the confluence of it and the Franklin), the next nine days will forever etch themselves in your paddling memories; travelling down Tassie's Franklin River by white-water raft should be a rite of passage for any paddler – that is how amazing this journey is.

It is not hard to pinpoint what the standout moment is rafting the Franklin River – put simply, it is every one of those nine days where you travel through a truly remote, near-inaccessible part of the southwest Tasmanian wilderness. The river's rapids are all unique in terms of their varying degrees of length, ruggedness and overall challenge (some are way above running; you will portage the gnarliest, such as The Churn), but these wilder, rougher sections are epic fun, and are compensated by sublime campsites such as the one at Newland Cascades, where you shelter under ancient open cave overhangs, with the river roaring past below.

You can run the Franklin faster than the nine days but we've chosen this World Ex-guided trip as our favourite Franklin River experience simply because, along with expert guides and awesome food, you do get a bit of time to take in the side trips along the river's length. This includes stopping off at world-famous Rock Island Bend (the subject of that very famous Peter Dombroskis photo that was used in the Save the Franklin campaign in the 1980s), and exploring the lush green canyon of The Lost World, on the last day.

In between these and other side-river highlights, you will soon immerse yourself in river life. From striking camp each morning where you load up all your gear into the huge drums, then load up the rafts with said drums, through to experiencing everything from Grade V rapids to silent, smooth sections of the river, and then pulling into yet another sublime campsite in the evening, the Franklin will soon become your life.

The terrain varies the entire way; from more open valleys with rolling green hills above, to the narrow, faster flowing, cliff-walled sections that make up the Grand Ravine, there is no real constant. Except, that is, for the rare chance to enjoy the simple act of dipping your drink bottle into the river, and then drinking the water straight out of it. As one guide told AG Outdoor Editor Justin Walker: "By the end of the nine days, you'll have become the Franklin." Yep, it sounds romantic, but if there's ever a place to reignite your passion for paddling – and the Aussie wilderness – then a rafting trip on the Franklin River is where it will happen.



YUKON RIVER QUEST, CANADA

Start: Whitehorse

Finish: Dawson City

Duration: Three to five days

More info: Race entry and canoe rental: www.yukonriverquest.com

Besides being another canoe and kayak event with a killer backstory, the Yukon River Quest can also claim to be the longest annual paddling race in the world. The 715km mega-marathon traces the route that prospectors took during the Klondike gold rush at the tail end of the 19th century, travelling down the mighty Yukon River from Whitehorse to Dawson City in northern Canada's wild Yukon Territory.

Known as the Race to the Midnight Sun, the quest takes place in terrain just a few degrees shy of the Arctic Circle, and traditionally kicks off at high noon on the Wednesday closest to the longest day of the northern hemisphere's calendar, the summer solstice, when the sun barely bothers going to bed at all.

In near-as-dammit 24-hour daylight, the event is contested by single and double canoes and kayaks, and eight-person voyageur canoes. It begins with a half-kilometre sprint along the riverbank before solo competitors and teams jump into their boats and begin paddling – an action that will become virtually subconscious within a few hours (let alone a few days).

The hardest part of the course is the crossing of Lake Laberge, a 50km stretch of current-less water, where any headwind can prove disastrous. And then there's the fatigue. There are two compulsory stops during the entire course – the longest one at Carmacks, where exhausted competitors are forced to rest for a minimum of seven hours. Otherwise racers paddle

day and night. There's no rule to say you can't pull over and stop anywhere you like – and people do – but there's a good reason that bear spray is listed among the compulsory race gear.

The snowmelt water of the Yukon is fast moving and freezing cold, but there is only one set of serious rapids along the entire 715km course: Five Finger Rapids, encountered a few hours after leaving Carmacks. It's clearly stated during the race briefing, and in the instructional booklet, that you have to take the right-hand channel through the jaws of this rabid rapid, but the whitewater always claims a couple of victims, especially among the larger voyageur canoes.

The fastest paddlers are often finished by Friday morning, but for many it takes a day or two longer before the welcome sight of Dawson City looms into view. For everyone, fatigue and sleep deprivation are constant companions after the first day, and it's not at all unusual for paddlers to experience sleep monsters (hallucinations common to long-distance endurance athletes when they're operating on minimal rest).

For all the discomforts it involves, the Yukon River Quest is a genuinely classic event, and a must-do for experience-collectors and passionate paddlers. The terrain of the Yukon Territory is utterly untamed, and the scenery is spellbinding from start to finish, especially on the sections that take you through remote riverside First Nation settlements, where locals come out to cheer you on.

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19



1 PIECE
BIT KIT



ADVENTURE | CYCLE TOURING, NEW ZEALAND

Hills and



New Zealand made its intentions clear from the beginning, forcing Paul to hike to the misty tops of the Richmond Range.

headwinds



Wild weather and challenging terrain
turn this one-month cycle tour of
New Zealand into seriously hard yakka.

WORDS AND PHOTOS DAN SLATER

Bluff: they couldn't have chosen a better name. Not only was the town situated on a lonely outcrop of rock, buffeted by the winds and seas of the roaring forties, but it had tricked us good and proper.

The perfect South Island cycling route had always been obvious to me: from the inter-island ferry terminal at Picton across to the West Coast, down to Bluff, back across to the East Coast and up to our starting point. Such a route would take in the best of Te Waipounamu (and more importantly would look great when drawn on a map) but was based on Bluff being the southernmost point of the mainland, and this was apparently not the case. That honour goes to Slope Point, a mere 15th of a degree further south but nearly 100km away. We'd been well and truly Bluffed.

DAY 1, PICTON

I always think of supermarkets when I think of New Zealand, probably because whenever I arrive here I immediately do a big shop for some imminent outdoor adventure, and today is no exception. Cycling around the South Island had been a dream of mine for, well about six months to be honest. Ever since our previous dream of driving through West Africa had been scuppered by a minute virus called Ebola, myself (treasurer and videographer) and Paul (navigator and mechanic) had seamlessly rerouted our planning efforts into another of our long list of work-avoidance schemes. Congratulations New Zealand – your number just came up!

DAY 5, WESTPORT

The way to the west coast, one of Lonely Planet's top 10 regions to visit in 2014, lies across Marlborough and the southern fingers of the Arthur Range. Mist and drizzle are abundant, shrouding the Douglas fir tree plantations that line the road over low but frequent hills. With every ragged exhalation into the cold air we add to the cloud, out of which roars a stream of vehicles like motorised banshees. This is not a gentle introduction to cycle touring.

When we were planning this caper the question our friends most often asked was about the hills – were we ready for them? A profound misunderstanding of cartography left me with the assumption that the terrain would be downhill all the way to Bluff and uphill on the way back, by which time we would be 'trek fit'. The truth had been a shock but we coped with pragmatism: when it rained, we donned our waterproofs; when it was sunny, we slapped on cream; when the road led uphill, we went up; when it led down, we... well, you get the idea.

We approach Cape Foulwind on New Year's Eve, although had we looked more closely at the map we may have avoided



such an ominously named place. We were expecting rain, sure, but not necessarily sheets of water thrown into our faces by 50km/h winds. The Lower Buller Gorge is beautiful (I can just about tell while being blown sideways into the path of camper vans and milk trucks) but we are glad to reach the haven of Westport. Soaked through, we treat ourselves to dorm beds and steak. The sleepy main street belies the hectic party that erupts later in the evening. Saddling up tomorrow will not be easy.

DAY 14, WANAKA

After a fortnight on the road we are hardened cycle tourists: we have the selection of bush campsites down to a fine art; our dinner routine is down pat – from unpacking the pots to eating our pasta and sauce takes precisely 20 minutes; sleep comes quickly, our tired legs still pedalling limply in our sleeping bags.

There were some teething troubles though: within minutes of restarting on New Year's Day, each pedal stroke felt like someone trying to prise my kneecap off with a screwdriver. This was the first of my body parts to signal defeat and we were less than a week in. Fortunately, full-time painkillers dulled the screwdriver sensation to that of a butter knife and I was able to continue. More amusingly, Paul got his sun cream and chamois cream mixed up and slathered his gonads in factor 50. He said it was an accident but I suspect he believes the sun shines out of his backside.

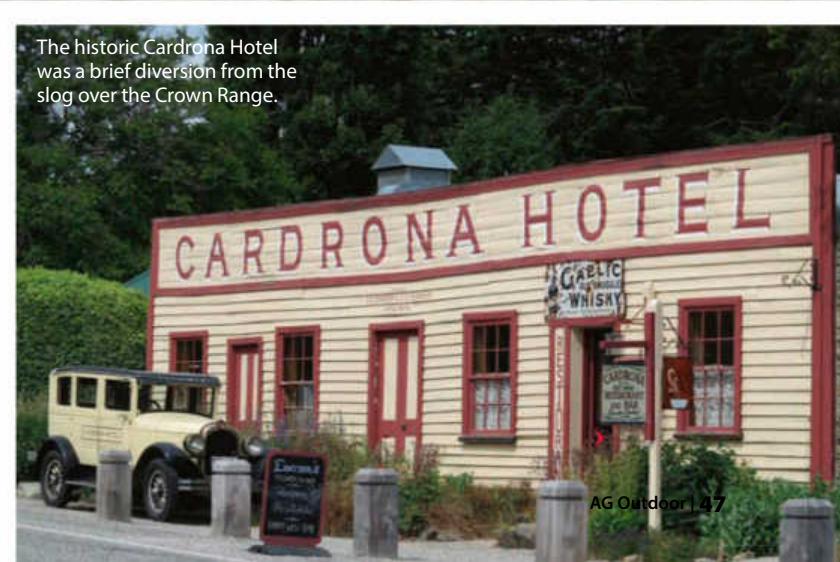
The west coast was rugged and beautiful, with picturesque rock stacks reminiscent of Victoria's Great Ocean Road but with the added fun of millions of sand flies. We ➤



Last one to Picton buys the drinks!



Following the Clutha River
while keeping an eye out
for missed gold deposits.



The historic Cardrona Hotel
was a brief diversion from the
slog over the Crown Range.



Top: The stunning Queen Charlotte Sound, which we biked as an encore.

Bottom: Paul developed multiple rider disorder by the time we reached Lake Wanaka.

Wanaka is our first full rest day and we know exactly what to do with it – eat, eat and eat, preferably standing up.

were very lucky with the weather and scored a record 115km day heading down to Haast, from where the pass back over the Southern Alps promised to be a big day. “It’ll test your mettle,” enthused one tourist at the picnic spot where we rested before the big push. “I think I’ve got mettle fatigue,” I replied through a mouthful of cheese and crackers.

Contrary to expectations the Haast Pass was lovely: all alpine meadows and cascades crashing down beside the road. Had it not been for the ridiculously steep gradient we would have had a smashing day. At least, we thought, the following day’s route around the base of Lakes Wanaka and Hawea would be flat. We were sadly mistaken. In fact, it’s amazing in how many otherwise-flat aspects of geography NZ manages to insert hills.

Wanaka is our first full rest day and we know exactly what to do with it – eat, eat and eat, preferably standing up. We’ve been averaging 72km per day and my bum is usually the first part of me to refuse to go further. I cringe at the naivety of my Day 1 self: “Wow,” I’d enthused upon realising the sun doesn’t set until 9pm, “We could ride for 14 hours a day!” Poor, innocent fool. Reasonable days with frequent breaks are necessary to prevent permanent damage to my arse bone.

DAY 19, BLUFF

It is an appropriately bleak day when we finally ride into Bluff. The leaden sky is pierced by the crying of seagulls carried on a stiff breeze. I pedal the last few kilometres toward the rocky headland, just visible through the drizzle, the town’s white buildings clustered low on the flanks of

the hill. So this is the legendary place to which we needn’t have come. Unfortunately, visiting Slope Point would entail a two-day detour which we can’t afford, so Bluff will have to do.

From Wanaka we’d crossed the Crown Range, the highest sealed road in NZ, to Queenstown. Where, I wondered, was the highest unsealed road? Until then we’d been pretty lucky with the weather: apart from those first few days of rain and the odd breeze we’d enjoyed blue skies, but as we pushed further south our luck thinned out until we were battling fierce headwinds. Not only did they sap our strength but the blasts from passing logging trucks were amplified; my helmet would have blown clean off many times had it not been strapped to my head. In a land where even the rural postboxes huddle together for protection, we are desperately looking forward to a tailwind.

Bluff isn’t a dead loss though – it was still the first European settlement in New Zealand and home of a coveted Land’s End-style signpost. “This is the furthest from the end of the ride you’re ever going to be,” says Paul, helpfully. Thanks, mate. He’s right though; there’s nothing for it but to point our handlebars north and go back to Picton.

DAY 22, OMAKAU, CENTRAL OTAGO

As cycle tourists, the wind is our nemesis. The promised tail wind out of Bluff propelled us along nicely for about 15 minutes before, incredibly, it changed direction and began howling out of the northwest. From that moment on we were pummelled, buffeted and blown sideways all day, every day. The wind was like a heat-seeking missile except that ➤



Colourful bee hives decorated the high meadows of the Kakanui Mountains



Traffic Jam! Stuck behind a few thousand sheep.

Stats

Total Distance: 2270km

Punctures: 0 Rest days: 3 Average distance per day: 78.3km

Longest day: 115km Shortest day: 38km



Home, sweet home.



Those Kiwis sure know how to party.



A quiet moment on the short Hawea River Track.



Day 32: It's all over! A pint of Speight's never tasted so good.



Katzhiko Takashige taking a quick breather from his 40,000km Peace Run.

whenever we changed direction it would move around to face us and hold its massive palm against our forehead like a schoolyard bully.

As soon as we left Invercargill behind we stayed off the main highways, choosing instead the network of smaller roads between farms. That meant fewer trucks, motorhomes and road kill, but also fewer rest stops and roadhouses. The wild mountains and coast were replaced by beautiful rolling farmland and scenes of rural idyll. Despite our battering near Cape Foulwind the country was apparently in drought and giant irrigation structures threw water in inventive ways across the landscape.

Some of the sections we have been most eagerly anticipating on this trip are the purpose-built bike trails of Central Otago. Nga Haerenga ('The journeys') is NZ's nationwide network of cycle-ways, comprising 2500km of trails and 23 Great Rides. Although our circuitous route does not coincide with many of the trails, we manage to incorporate sections of the Clutha Gold trail, Roxburgh Gorge Trail and the classic Otago Central Rail Trail on our way north.

Getting onto the network is a huge relief and the kilometre markings fly past as we remember the joy of off-roading. We follow the wide, blue Clutha River past historic

gold diggings and around the spectacular Roxburgh Gorge, now flooded by a hydroelectric dam. The Otago Rail Trail is less visually impressive but no less fun, winding between dry hills of wind-blasted tussock, through eerie tunnels and over creaky wooden viaducts.

It is grand fun but the dust and gravel play havoc with my drivetrain. After a few kilometres my chain is squeaking like a rusty mouse and changing gear sounds more like I'm kicking over a trolley full of surgical items. Man and bike are relieved when we pull into Omakau's campground for a shower and a pint. "The cyclists usually camp over there," says the proprietor helpfully, pointing at a copse of poplars bent over at 45 degrees. I scan the back pages of the *Otago Daily Times* for headlines such as 'Strongest Winds Since Records Began' or 'Otago Braces for Hurricane' but find nothing except the chilling revelation that a bike has been stolen from outside the post office. It seems that these skin-scouring gales are nothing special.

DAY 27, CHRISTCHURCH

In an attempt to keep off the highway for a few more days Paul took us inland through the sleepy village of Naseby and up into the not insignificant Kakanui mountains. Beautiful though they were, our route took us over Danseys Pass – according to locals the highest unsealed road in NZ! At least I no longer had to wonder at its whereabouts.

Once over that we reached the long, straight, flat roads of the Canterbury Plains where we could scoot along at 25km/h – heaven! So far we have not had the luxury of taking in many tourist attractions, our main aim being to progress as far as possible toward our goal, but now that the end is in sight we can relax a little and spend a day exploring the reconstruction of this resilient city.

DAY 32, PICTON

Past the vineyards of Blenheim and the seals and beaches of Kaikoura we ride, through a final range of rough, green peaks to the town that met us, fresh and enthusiastic, off the ferry a month ago. In that time we've seen snow-capped peaks, glacial lakes of the deepest blue, offshore rock stacks and sheep. Lots of sheep. We've hitched a lift on a jet boat, learned not to eat trail mix while riding over corrugated gravel and fought an orc army for the treasure of Smaug. Well, maybe I imagined that last bit.

Then there were the other cycle tourists. During our circumnavigation we met dozens of them, mostly Swiss, riding on anything from tandems to recumbents to credit cards. We met Katzhiko Takashige, a Japanese man who is running 40,000km on five continents for world peace; we watched Peter Caldwell, cycling solo from Cape Reinga to Bluff (I wonder if he knows – ha!) to raise funds for diabetes, and hold up a mile of traffic over NZ's longest road bridge; we even passed a chap who appeared to be Nordic blading across the country!

But now we're done, and the ferry back to Wellington approaches. Work beckons. For now though, I dream of luxurious sofas and doughy pizzas. I can't wait to do nothing: I close my eyes; I empty my mind; I am at peace. Now then, where did I put that map of West Africa?

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Pushing

For most of its length, Ireland's River Barrow flows smooth, like a perfectly poured stout. But a good river, like a decent pint, is judged by the white frothy bits on the top – and that's where things get interesting when you're paddling a fully laden canoe with your septuagenarian Dad at the helm...

The

RIVER BARROW, IRELAND | ADVENTURE

Shooting a weir – Pat takes the canoe down one of the River Barrow's salmon runs.

Barrow



The best adventures start – and finish – in the pub.

AS WE CLANGED A COUPLE of peat-black post-expedition pints together at the end of our 120km canoeing and camping caper along Ireland's River Barrow, Dad accused me of attempting euthanasia by stealth. Which was a bit rich, I thought, considering the whole escapade was his idea in the first place.

Seventy-two years young, he reckoned to be knackered – but I hadn't seen him so alive for years. **The big dopey grin** on his dial was a wide as the Guinness moustache above it. Had I really been trying to bump him off, this was evidently an awful way of doing it.

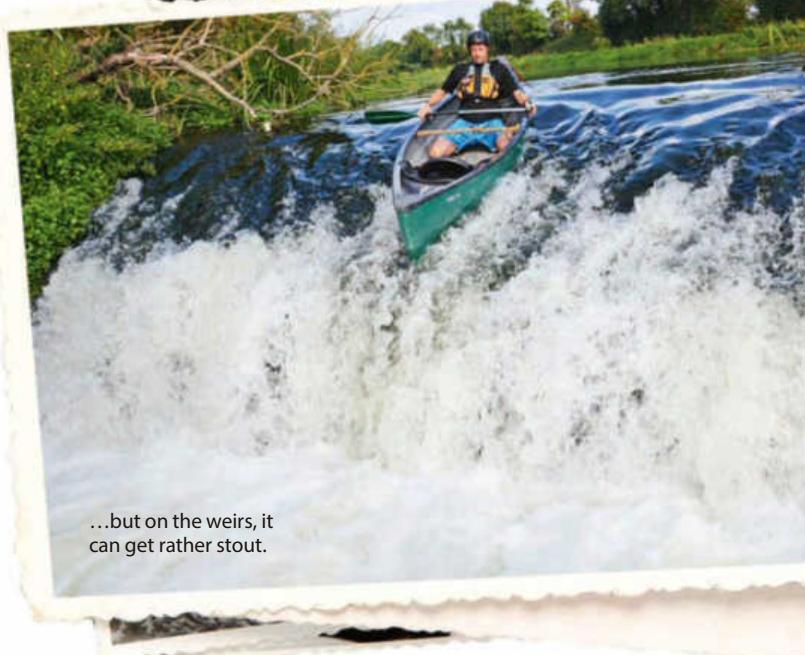
We'd just spent five quality days together, under surprisingly blue Irish skies, paddling through an historic and bucolic landscape, on a river that flows freely with a rich mix of myth, legend, wildlife and adventure.

TWISTED SISTER

Overlooked for much of its length by the moody broody Blackstairs Mountains, which feed the river with streams, the Barrow wends through six counties in central Ireland, its serpentine course punctuated only by the odd town and occasional castle. Oh, and a loads of weirs and a smattering of rapids too. Dad wasn't so keen on those at the beginning. But we'd come to an understanding.

The Barrow – part of a trio of Irish waterways known as the Three Sisters, along with its smaller siblings the rivers Suir and Nore – has been modified by man over many centuries to suit needs such as fishing and transportation. At its northern end it joins with the Grand Canal, an aquatic umbilicus connecting rural Ireland to Dublin, and it's navigable for its whole length.

For some stretches of the waterway, canals with locks have been built parallel to the river, to allow larger boats to get ➤



...but on the weirs, it can get rather stout.

For much of its serpentine length, Ireland's second longest river is as smooth and dark as good Guinness...



...the Barrow wends through six counties in central Ireland, its serpentine course punctuated only by the odd town and occasional castle. Oh, and loads of weirs and a smattering of rapids too.



...we could use the painters (ropes on the bow and stern) to lower the canoe down the whitewater. Or we could throw caution to the wind and run the pier...

around the more exciting spots, where submerged rocks lie in ambush and the flow gets steeper and wilder.

Our plan was to join the Barrow just below the junction with the Grand Canal, at Monasterevin, and to paddle downstream all the way down to New Ross, where the river meets the salt-water of the Celtic Sea in an estuary that rises and falls with the tides. We would stick to the natural curves of the waterway for the duration, avoiding the locks and following the flow.

For each lock we bypassed, there was at least one weir to contend with. In a fully laden canoe, packed to gunwales with camping equipment and supplies, this involved an interesting choice. Either we could, as Dad had made me promise, unload every damn thing out of the boat and portage the whole lot around. Or we could get out of the canoe and use the painters (ropes on the bow and stern of the canoe) to carefully lower it down the whitewater in a controlled manner. Or we could throw caution to the wind and run the weir, risking capsizé and calamity in the process.

Our sensible and unified approach to this conundrum remained rock solid for at least one day – during which we didn't encounter any weirs to test it. Which was fortunate, because we could ill afford to stand around and argue about whether we should portage or run them on that opening day. We hadn't managed to get the canoe packed and to the put-in until early afternoon, and had to get to Athy before nightfall.

After a couple of hours cooing over the kingfishers that kept skimming the river, stopping for photos and sorting out who was going to sit where in the boat, our leisurely paddling cadence suddenly had to increase in tempo to something approximating race pace with the belated realisation that the

sunset was right on our tail.

It takes time to sync into a decent rhythm in a two-man canoe, especially when you haven't paddled together for a while. Muscles that we'd both allowed to get rusty were abruptly called back into action, and mentally I had to dig deep to recall the mechanics of the J-stroke – the pull with an outward kick that the rear paddler needs to employ in order to keep a canoe going straight.

Eventually, though, we got it dialled, passing under the bridge beside Athy's 600-year-old White Castle while it was still light enough to see the local crossfit crew doing running reps and burpees on the banks, before finishing off their session by jumping into the river.

Although we didn't encounter any other canoes all week, every day we saw people running and riding along the towpath, or wild swimming in the river – a good sign that both the water and the locals are in rude health.

BARROW BOYS

The Barrow is Ireland's second longest river, after the broad majestic Shannon. Dad grew up just outside of Limerick, quite literally on the banks of the Shannon, in a village called Corbally, where my Grandad built the family abode a little too close to the river. So close, in fact, that sometimes it came to visit them. His was a Huckleberry Finn-like childhood, spent messing about in boats, and occasionally wading around a house full of floodwater.

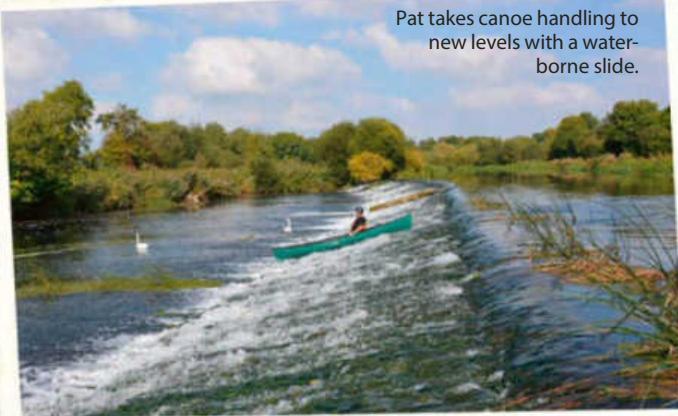
And it was Dad that instilled a love of larking about in the outdoors in me. He took me on annual hiking and camping trips when I was a kid, packed me off on a survival course in the Hebrides in Scotland when I was 12, and always encouraged activities like kayaking.

With age, though, comes caution – and Dad was firmly of the opinion that we should portage the weirs. The weather was good, but not so hot that he wanted to take an involuntary swim every few kilometres, especially when we had so much gear with us.

That resolve lasted for precisely one weir, the first one we came to after leaving Athy. Subsequently we discovered that each weir had a salmon run on it – a chute where the flow was faster but smoother than the surrounding cascade, which accommodated something the size of our canoe perfectly and was great fun to run. We still unloaded some of the gear, and Dad hopped out for the bigger drops, but shooting the weirs like this cut down on all the messing about that a full portage involved, and it upped the excitement level of the trip by several notches.

As the river passed through historic towns like Carlow, we often had an audience when we ran the weirs. This upped

Pat takes canoe handling to new levels with a water-borne slide.



Running the gauntlet with an audience in Graiguenamanagh, County Kilkenny.



A trail for hikers and bikers runs right along the Barrow's towpath, but the riverbank is almost as little trafficked as the waterway.

Kinsella Senior and Junior at the pull-out point in New Ross, County Wexford, shortly before the Barrow spills into the Celtic Sea.





Departing predawn to paddle the final stretch with the outgoing tide.

the ante considerably, but despite a couple of close calls, we stayed the right way up and made good progress. The second night we camped right by the lock gates in a picturesque spot called Milford, but the best experience was to come further downstream, along the river's wildest stretch, just after the beautiful village of Borris.

For this section we were joined by Charlie from Go With the Flow adventures. Charlie runs guided trips along the Barrow and rents out equipment to those who want to do it independently. He had provided our canoe, but wanted to show us this part of the river personally – largely, I got the distinct impression, because he simply can't get enough of paddling it himself. And I soon learned why.

Well away from any roads, the river here snakes around deep, steep, tree-lined banks and through the forest-filled grounds of a vast old mansion house owned for centuries by the MacMurrough Kavanagh family, one-time High Kings of Leinster. In the 19th century, one of the family, Arthur MacMurrough Kavanagh, an MP at Westminster, used to sail his yacht from here to London to attend parliament – despite the fact that he was severely disabled.

But it's not the history that gets Charlie excited about this bit of river. It's the rapids. Shooting weirs is one thing, but running real rapids is what canoeing is all about, and here the Barrow delivers in spades, with numerous submerged rock gardens, salmon traps and small drops to negotiate. Charlie brought along a few friends and we mixed it up, swapping boats and even jumping out of the canoes altogether and floating through some of the rapids on our backs.

After bidding Charlie and co farewell at Graiguenamanagh, we paddled on and made camp on a small island by the musical weir above St Mullins, the exact point where the river becomes tidal.

RIDING THE TIDE

To catch the last of the outgoing tide, we launched long before dawn, and navigated the Guinness-dark water by headtorch for a couple of hours. Daybreak delivered us into a much-changed landscape, with the wide river now fringed by mudflats and populated by seabirds.

The tide turned against us before we could reach New Ross, but the Barrow had a last surprise in store before we bid it farewell. Paddling hard against the incoming flow, we looked up to see a family of otters cavorting around in the water just a few feet ahead. They looked at us quizzically, and then carried on with their business, leaving us grinning all the way to the pull out.

Just before filing this story, I got an email from the old man. He had a question for me: Do you fancy a canoe trip down the River Shannon this summer? He's obviously developed a taste for this form of euthanasia.

THE ESSENTIALS

Getting there: You can fly from Sydney or Melbourne to Dublin from around \$1300 with various airlines, including Qantas, British Airways and Etihad. Distances are short in Ireland compared to Australia, and trains and buses travel regularly between Dublin and Monasterevin, and also New Ross and the capital.

Tours/equipment: Go With The Flow offers a range of options for people paddling the Barrow, from one-day fully guided experiences, through to arranging equipment and logistics (including drop-off and pick-up) for groups who want to explore the river independently. The company also offers a range of other river trips and adventure experiences.

Visit: www.gowiththeflow.ie or call +353 (0) 567 801 299 for more information.



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SOMETHING SECRET THIS WAY

No matter what your preferred outdoor adventure, BC's Cariboo Chilcotin Coast offers something for everyone, all wrapped in breathtaking scenery.

WORDS AND PHOTOS JUSTIN WALKER



There's nothing quite as exhilarating as a heli-hike in the Coast Mountains of British Columbia.

Tackling the heights of 4 Mile Ridge is worth the sweat once you get to the top and experience the panoramic views of the surrounding peaks and valley.



IT WAS SURREAL: one minute I was soaking up the views from a high, snow-peppered mountain ridge in British Columbia, overlooking the Bella Coola valley, the next I was inside a helicopter sliding backwards off a snowy cliff edge, around 1500m above the ground. Yeah, maybe “surreal” is the wrong word; plain “scared” is probably the most apt description as pilot Richard LaPointe guided the chopper backwards and off the edge of the cliff, dropping into thin air. Even over the roar of the chopper blades, I reckon I could still hear the collective intake of breath from my fellow passengers...

Going to the other side

When people think of British Columbia, their thoughts invariably turn to the lush coastline and craggy mountain ranges just north of Vancouver. However, continue further north, say, about a third of the way up the BC coast, and you arrive in a region that, on the map, just looks nice and quiet, but is truly wild and remote: the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast. Stretching from the township of Bella Coola, at the confluence of the Bella Coola River and Burke Channel in the



Tweedsmuir Lodge guide Les Koroluck is a fit and spritely 72 years old with plenty of yarns to tell.

west, up and across the Coast Mountains to the plateau of the Chilcotin and, further east, Cariboo, this region is crisscrossed with big rivers, dotted with bigger lakes and bordered by high mountains – oh, and a ton of potential adventures.

And the adventure started as soon as we (myself and a group of fellow journos) landed at Anahim Lake, up on the Chilcotin Plateau, for our introduction to both the region, and our gregarious host, Geoff Moore. Geoff has lived in the region most of his life and his passion for the place became evident from the get-go as he ushered us, firstly, onto our bus, and then off said bus and onto a floatplane. Not just any floatplane, mind you; I was lucky enough to score a seat in Tweedsmuir Air’s sweet de Havilland Canada DHC-2 Beaver – the ubiquitous bush plane in this part of the world and one that has provided decades of safe, reliable transport for many an expedition into Canada’s wilderness. Scrambling up into one of these always signals an adventure is in the offing, and that was again true on this afternoon.

Our destination was the remote Turner Lakes, a chain of lakes nestled in the mountainous Rainbow Range’s southern section. The Turner Lakes are a prime canoe-travel destination; it is possible to spend a few days paddling from one lake to the next, with the portages between each lake quite small, and there are well-maintained campgrounds at each one. Turner Lakes is also the location of Canada’s third-highest waterfall – Hunlen Falls – that is easily reached via a short hike from the lakes’ main campground. It was Hunlen Falls that was our primary destination once we’d all disembarked at Turner Lake, where guide George Probek met us. George’s knowledge of this location was amazing and kept us well entertained during the short walk (around 30 minutes) to what would have to be the most exposed lookout I have ever seen.

Coming from a country where anything remotely dangerous means plenty of fences and warning signs (if any access is allowed at all), standing close to a 1500m drop-off, with nary a barrier in sight, was a unique experience. Our viewpoint was on the far side from the falls, with the cliff walls dropping near vertically into the valley below us, where the flow from Hunlen Falls joins a tributary of the Bella Coola River.

As our visit to this spectacularly rugged landscape was brief, I mentally tagged Turner Lakes for a return trip; the canoe adventure alone would be brilliant, and there is also a hiking trail you can use to walk in from civilisation. Combining a long hike with a few days paddling, and then returning to town via a Beaver flight, would be a memorable adventure... although this was topped – in a different way – by our night’s accom-



The hulk of a fishing boat is a reminder of the region's boom times. The fishing industry is smaller now, but still strong.

modation in The Dean on Nimpo, a pristine lodge run by the Irwin family that sits right at Nimpo Lake. Yep, it was the dream finish to an epic day.

Lodging no complaints

It is called The Freedom Road. Highway 20 links the high plateau of the Chilcotin with the central coast and Bella Coola and drops you down around 1350m to the Bella Coola Valley Floor. The name derives from the history of the road's construction, mostly in the early 1950s. The provincial government of the time terminated the original highway at Anahim Lake, 137km from Bella Coola and the central coast. Reasons given were many, with the main one being the sheer ruggedness of the mountains the road would have to be forged through. This failed to deter local volunteers, however, who proceeded to dig, bulldoze and form the road, working from both ends until it was completed. The drive itself is awesome; winding down the very steep mountains you travel close to the edge in places and the vistas out across the valley keep your mind off the drops.

Tweedsmuir Park Lodge is a member of the exclusive 'Magnificent 7', a select group of wilderness lodges in Canada, and it is easy to see how it has attained its lofty rating: the lodge (built in 1929) and its 60 acres (25ha) is located right on the beautiful Atnarko River. Originally built as a hunting and fishing lodge, today's lucky guests can indulge in fly fishing, float down the river in a cool dory boat, explore the surrounding provincial park on foot or bike, opt for some heli-hiking and, of course, go

The Turner Lakes are a prime canoe destination; it's possible to spend a few days paddling from one lake to the next.

bear spotting. Tim, the marketing manager (and an Aussie to boot), explained that in the middle of bear season, guests often spot bears right out the front of their cabins and the lodge itself. It is indeed a spectacular location, with the river running beside the lodge and the majestic Coast Mountains looming in the distance – I wondered to myself, as I sat on my cabin's verandah, why you would even move from this spot. All you'd need is this knockout view, a steady supply of food, the odd beer and your imagination to transport you to a genuine outdoor dreamland.

We were based here for two days; not nearly enough, but still sufficient for a cracking experience as we tackled a few day hikes, and had the chance to undertake a river-drift journey down the Atnarko. Tweedsmuir guide, Les Koroluk, an incredibly fit 72-year-old, steered our dory with aplomb downriver while regaling us with some cool yarns about the ➤

The hike, led by guide Doug Baker, was brilliant, and followed a rough path along the spine of the ridge...





Drifting down the beautiful At納ko River, near Tweedsmuir Lodge, is a good way to spot bears.



The petroglyphs at Thorsen Creek are estimated to be more than 5000 years old.

many close encounters he's had over the years on the river. The funniest of these was his recollection of a young female bear charging the boats from the riverbank, over and over, for no apparent reason. The closest he has come to a bear on the river was when he drifted the dory past a fallen tree that stretched over half the river's width. The bear was perched right at the end, virtually directly above the dory. Les reckoned it was the quietest that group of guests was the whole time they stayed at the lodge. I couldn't wonder why...

Strength of culture

With any media-based trip, you are never sure what you will get when it comes to itinerary highlights, so it was a most welcome surprise to meet and spend a few hours with Chris and Bryan, representatives of the Nuxalk First Nations. These two were incredibly passionate about their culture and led us on a walk along a trail beside the pretty Thorsen Creek, steadily upward to an amazing sight: a huge collection of 5000-year-old petroglyphs, covering a vast area of rock looking over the raging river below. It's often viewed as a cliché, but being there as Chris and Bryan recounted the many stories associated with the engravings, surrounded by an ancient forest, really stirred emotions in those present. Chris finished off with a Nuxalk song (accompanied by drum) and we then returned, enriched by the experience.

We then met Alvin Mack, a renowned Nuxalk artist who specialises

in carvings. Alvin's studio/house is packed with amazing examples of his intricate work, all of which have their own story, but tantalisingly out of reach for me on my journo's salary. Still, I tucked his works away in my mind's wishlist; maybe one day I would be lucky enough to return to buy a piece. It would be worth the trip alone – Alvin's work is that impressive.

A high point

All through our time in the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast region, the Coast Mountains had loomed strong in the background. Finally, though, we got the chance to become far more familiar with a part of this impressive range, via Richard LaPointe and his helicopter, who was our airborne taxi to the start of the 4 Mile Ridge heli-hike. On the way up, Richard did a circuit of the Bella Coola Valley, where we scored a sweet close-up view of the Coast Mountains before he deftly landed the chopper at the start of our hike.

The ridge is covered in huge rocks, hardy plants and ice-cold tarns. The hike, led by guide Doug Baker (who had also led us through a forest wonderland earlier in the trip) was brilliant, and followed a rough path along the spine of the ridge, with immense mountains off to both sides of us. It was a brilliant ➤



This walkway leads to Tallheo Springs, a hot spring overlooking the waters of South Bentinck Arm.

way to spend half a day, with the epic scenery only outdone by that memorable helicopter departure at the end.

A fine finish

I felt insanely privileged as I soaked myself in the warm waters of the lower pool at Tallheo Hot Springs, sipping a cold beer as I looked over the decidedly colder waters of South Bentinck Arm, with the MV Nekhani moored just below us. Skipper (and Bella Coola Grizzly Tours owner) Leonard Ellis completed the perfect picture; the smell of freshly caught salmon being cooked by Leonard on the ship's barbecue was wafting up to us in the hot pool. At that point, I doubted there was anything more the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast could have done to impress me, but there was still more to come...

Salmon fishing was (and still is) huge business along the BC coast, and our final accommodation – Tallheo Cannery Guest House – was the ultimate reminder of just how big this industry had been earlier in the 20th century. Tallheo Cannery itself was a small town in its own right in its heyday, with a population of around 300 workers and plenty of permanent residential buildings, as well as a general store, spread over its 160 acres (65ha). Now, the guesthouse comprises a few old buildings, while the cannery is well past its 1910–1947 working life. What is left, though, is a brilliant time capsule and something that current owners, Garrett Newkirk and his wife Skye, are more than happy to show guests around. The cannery itself has been left much as it was, with a number of nets, all in different shades of green and blue, to reflect the different coloured water found at the various fishing locations throughout the waterways here. The nets also have various sized gill net holes, dependent on the type of salmon being fished for. Garrett recounted how the cannery worked – and

just how busy it was in the boom times – as I tried to get my head around how this now-skeletal structure was a non-stop working concern.

Staying in one of the guesthouses was a totally different finish to what I have experienced on previous BC adventures, but it seemed totally apt. The only sounds were the occasional creak of floorboards, a cry from a gull and the whisper of the wind as it funnelled across North Bentinck Arm from Bella Coola. It was comforting and a great excuse to run through the variety of experiences we'd had over our busy five days. From canoe journeys, remote hikes and mountain air tours, to bear watching and cultural experiences, the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast proved that when it comes to seeking adventure-laden destinations, that old adage "it's the quiet ones you have to pay the most attention to" rings true.

THE ESSENTIALS

Getting there: Air Canada flies direct from Sydney to Vancouver daily. See www.aircanada.com.

From Vancouver, Pacific Coastal Airlines flies to Bella Coola and Anahim Lake. See www.pacificcoastal.com.

Accommodation: Anahim Lake: The Dean on Nimpo (www.thedeanonnimpo.com); Stewart's Lodge (www.stewartslodge.com)
Bella Coola: Tweedsmuir Lodge (www.tweedsmuirparklodge.com); Bella Coola Grizzly Tours (www.bcgrizzlytours.com); Bella Coola Mountain Lodge (www.bcmountainlodge.com); Tallheo Cannery Guesthouse ([www.bellacoolacannery.com](http://bellacoolacannery.com))

More info: Cariboo Chilcotin Coast is a huge area, but thankfully its website is packed with handy information on the region's activities, adventure outfitters, accommodation, cultural history and plenty more. See www.landwithoutlimits.com. For info on British Columbia, see www.HelloBC.com.au and for all things Canada go to www.canada.travel.

AG Outdoor was a guest of Destination BC and the Canadian Tourism Commission.



The Bella Coola Valley forests contain some of the region's oldest trees. Guide Doug Baker was a fount of information on these giants.

Misty dawn departure
from Deadmans Bay to
Cockle Creek.

THE
PADDLING ISSUE

ADVENTURE | SOUTHWEST COAST, TASMANIA

OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK

Paddling Tasmania's dangerous waters can be tricky at the best of times. Paddling the formidable and unchartered southwest coast requires plenty of preparation, the right gear and a healthy dose of optimism.

WORDS AND PHOTOS PAUL KARIS





WE WOKE TO THE SOUND of pounding surf. Ketchum Bay was closing out with eight-foot monsters, but we really didn't want to stick around. We were already eight days in and running out of time.

After watching the sets roll in, we figured we had between one-and-a-half and two minutes to get from the impact zone to backline. I was doubtful; not so my good buddy, kayaking companion, incurable optimist and all-round prince of positivity Pete Rand.

"Heaps of time!" he pronounced as he launched himself into the fray.

It wasn't long before Pete was side surfing his 6m boat all the way back to shore, nursing a deep cut to his hand and half his deck gear hanging loose after the flogging.

I went next, lifting to high cadence when it looked clear. Oh shit, set wave! Do not hesitate now. Paddle, paddle, paddle... I fully launched my boat clean out of the water over the curling demon.

Pete made it out on his second attempt after repairing his badly cut hand, stowing his gear, and having a little talk with himself to get pumped. Just as well. I had the tent and the stove and I wasn't going back for him.

Later that night at Deadmans Bay, Pete stood to full height, stretched his arms over his head and said: "This is how big the white water was that nailed me!"

It was six months before our heart-stopping episode at Ketchum Bay that we first began hatching a plan to sea kayak the 300km from Strahan to Cockle Creek around Tasmania's rugged southwest coast. It would be a test: a great journey, but most definitely a test. Some of the

tales are horrific. Guys being cartwheeled down the faces of rogue waves, beach landings closed out to monstrous surf, miles of cliff sections, paddlers rafted up for a night at sea...

Yet the remoteness and beauty of the untouched and rarely explored wilderness called to me. Fuelled by late night sessions on Google Earth, I zoomed in on every beach, bay, cove and gulch and it looked amazing, I had to go. My "glass half full" adventure buddy Pete would make a fine companion.

Over the years I've ticked off a few solid trips including Bass Strait, but I still had a lot of trepidation about the southwest. Meticulous planning seemed to ease the mind. The boat was overhauled bow to stern. Plenty of new gear was commandeered, including a personal locator beacon, marine radio, flares, GPS and a new buoyancy vest to fit all this stuff in.

Pete and I Skype-ed long into the night, comparing notes on the best spots to break, lunch, overnight and evacuate in an emergency.

Comments like, "McKays Gulch is loaded with crays" sent me into over-froth. Pete worked off topographic maps while I used marine charts. Some of these parts hadn't been surveyed since Captain James Cook passed through, so good data on land features was essential for cross-referencing. (Navigation, especially at sea, is not

one of my strengths: "Keep Tassie on your left!" yelled a mate on departure).

The last weeks of summer would hopefully bring calm weather just before the winter low pressures pushed up from Antarctica, and near-perfect conditions when we set out from Hells Gates Macquarie Harbour seemed to confirm that.

THE WILD SIDE OF LIFE

The forecast was for a three to four-metre swell and light NW winds. The paddling was ideal. Then we rounded Cape Sorell and the wildness of the open ocean gatecrashed our consciousness. Things we'd read about or been told by those who knew these parts were suddenly making sense.

"You should expect to regularly encounter swells twice the size of the reported average," was one piece of advice that came to mind as an 8m monster rolled over a reef 100m off our bow. Impressive. And terrifying. We'd need to keep a look out for these as we threaded our way through the many shallow reefs over the coming days.

My left shoulder ached with every stroke. Eight-and-a-half hours' paddling with a laden boat was not the ideal way to ease into a multiday trip.

We'd also been warned about the effect of large swell combined with a big swell period (the time between each wave). It causes the swell to push deep into the bays and beaches making landings heinous. This had weighed on our minds all day, as potential camp spots can be few and far between.

Dismayed with the wild conditions at our planned overnighter at Hibbs Lagoon, we wearily pushed on a few more kilometres to

Yet the remoteness and beauty of untouched and rarely explored wilderness called to me.



Clockwise from above: Relieved to find the secluded entrance to Deadmans Bay camp; Pete stroking into Spain Bay, Port Davey; PK brewing mid morning espresso at Mainwaring Inlet.



Above: Paul and Pete, stoked to arrive at Cockle Creek.

Left: Steak-sized abalone cooked in their shells on a bed of coals.

Sanctuary Cove, lying sheltered in the lee of the Hibbs Pyramid monolith. Exhausted but exhilarated we stoked up a driftwood fire and enjoyed stretching out flat on our backs. Day one done!

ROUTINE EXCITEMENT

By 12.30pm on day two we were approaching Christmas Cove with trepidation. The bay seemed to be closing out with solid sets and the thought of paddling another 15km to the next landing was soul destroying.

As we drew closer, there appeared to be a narrow channel bisecting the bay to the mouth of the Wanderer River. Trying to not look over our shoulders every few seconds for rogue sets, we threaded the needle and arrived at the jewel in the crown of Tassie's southwest. The beauty of this wild place was startling. As we explored upstream later that day, we pondered how many people had witnessed this; it's practically inaccessible except to sea kayakers. Whatever happened from here on in would be a bonus.

We started to find our routine. My first job was to get the macchinetta fired up for the much-needed espresso hit after our 4.44am alarm (the optimist insisted things work out well when you get up early). At sea, life was also starting to get comfortable. Pete and I would raft up every hour to have a quick snack, pee into bottles, check our bearings and then grind out another hour. The marine charts took on meaning; nautical miles and speed in knots made more sense than metric measurements. We were finding our rhythm.

Day three was to be a crux day. Ahead were 55km traversing the reef-riddled coast from

High Rocky Point to Low Rocky Point. The swell coming from the southwest at less than 3m should make it okay. Rounding Low Rocky Point, Pete saw a tuna jump out of the water. "Get a line out mate!" he shouted.

I paddled toward the action. Three, two, one, bam! A tuna hits and while I fumble around trying to release the hand line and balance in the choppy water, the fish robs me of my \$25 lure. It was all of about two seconds of intense excitement. I'd be better prepared next time.

As the afternoon drew on, we slid into Giblin River in Nye Bay, another astonishing piece of wilderness that would become home for the next couple of days. Gale force southwesterly winds and a 5m swell pounded the coast and kept us confined to our shanty camp a couple of kilometres upstream. The days passed and our bodies loved the inactivity. An evening satellite phone call to our weather guy confirmed easing conditions and the alarm was set for 4.44am.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Day Six marked the official last day of summer and the west coast turned it on; light offshore winds and not a cloud in the sky. We powered down the coast and had the pleasant surprise of underestimating our position (one of the benefits of being a pessimist).

This section of coast has not been surveyed and is not easy to navigate. Some hairy manoeuvres between the reefs of West Pyramid and Sharks Jaw brought us to North Head and the entrance to Port Davey. After seven-and-a-half hours of paddling with no lunch, we arrived at Spain Bay where Pete had organised a food drop.

We tore into the bag and took the top off a cold Boag's to celebrate a major milestone.

That afternoon I hiked over the headland to Stephens Bay and watched perfect waves roll in without another soul to be found.

Rounding South West Cape was a highlight. The collision of big swell with the steep cliffs on its western side is quite a show. Here, there is nothing between you and Antarctica – a bit like that eerie feeling of swimming in really deep water. We hugged the coast as close as we dared.

"Tuna country, PK! Get your line out," Pete said. I got a hit and the line started to strip. My lure, steel trace and rig were holding but the line was running at an alarming pace. I struggled to slow the spool on my deck, then one more surge and everything was gone. Damn!

Pete laughed. "You've been spooled, mate!"

Thoughts of fresh sashimi perished but seafood was still on my mind.

Arriving at Ketchum Bay, we set up camp and went diving for crayfish and abalone. In frigid water with thin wetsuit tops we lasted 15 minutes. Pete just missed out on some crawlers but salvaged a couple of dinner-plate-sized abs. Cooked in their shells with olive oil and garlic on a bed of coals, they were bloody delicious.

After the drama of our departure from the bay, the paddle to Deadmans Cove was a breeze.

Our last day to Cockle Creek passed in a dreamy haze. There wasn't a breath of wind as we ploughed along, dreaming of steaks and beer. The wild southwest had lived up to its reputation. It had been an incredible, testing and unforgettable journey, and one made all the better by travelling with an optimist.

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ADVENTURE | COLORADO RIVER, GRAND CANYON

In the Belly of the Beast

Rafting the Grand Canyon you are spoilt for choice, but you'll want to book well in advance if you intend tackling this stretch of the Colorado River.

THE
PADDLING  ISSUE

WORDS AND PHOTOS RON MOON

T

HE ROAR OF THE WHITEWATER was somewhat muted as we drifted in the lazy current along a flat stretch between rapids, but our boatman Brock still had to near yell to be heard above the thunder.

"We're in the belly of the beast," he declared. "The deepest part of the canyon, the walls the steepest, the river the narrowest, the water the fastest, the rapids near continuous... and the biggest."

Above us and all around were the great imposing walls of the Grand Canyon, rising up on average a mile (1.6km) in vertical height to the tourist viewpoint of the South Rim, unseen by us and seemingly so distant; in both mind and matter, as to be another world.

Then we were grabbing hand holds again as the boat slipped into the V of fast moving water leading into yet another rapid; this one the technically difficult 'Hance Rapid' with its 30-foot drop and mass of rock. From this point for the next 15 miles the river is confined to a relatively narrow channel, with no campsites to be found along the near sheer-sided cliffs and with substantial rapids every mile or so to keep you amused... or terrified, depending on your state of mind.

Like all Grand Canyon rafting trips, ours had started a few days earlier at Lees Ferry – 'Mile-O' in the rafters' handbook. For the first two days or so the river flows 60 miles (100km) through Marble Canyon, the cliffs above gradually increasing in height while the rocks immediately at water level become older the further you head into the canyon.

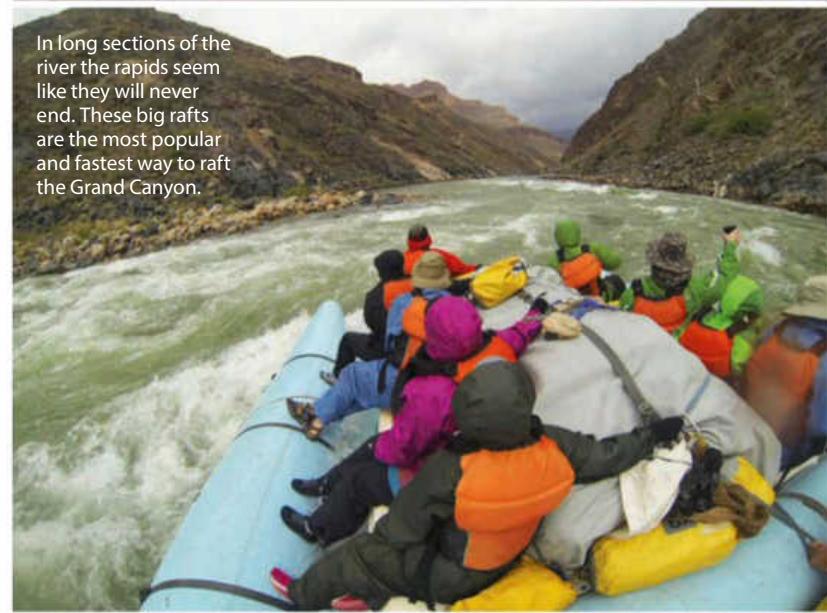
ANY WHICH WAY YOU CAN

There are about 16 companies offering rafting trips down the Grand Canyon, ranging from one day fly-in-fly-out affairs from Las Vegas to 14-day adventures on motor, paddle or oar rafts. While an oar raft is powered by a single rowing guide (known as the 'boatman'), the paddle rafts are powered by four paddling guests, guided and helped by a boatman. Another option, but one we only saw once during our time on the river, is a trip through the canyon in a wooden dory, which is also

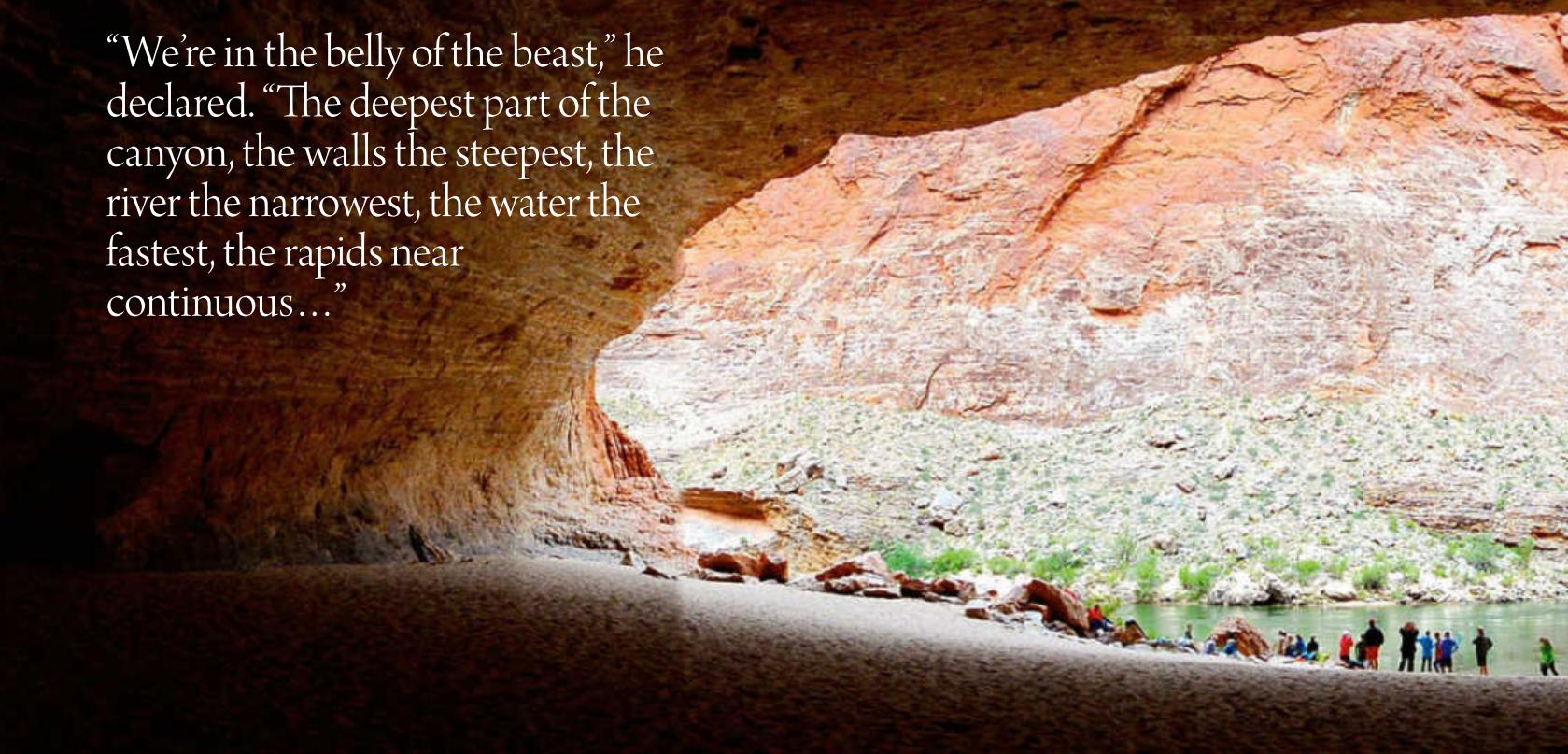
"We're in the belly of the beast," he declared. "The deepest part of the canyon, the walls the steepest, the river the narrowest, the water the fastest, the rapids near continuous..."



The easy way to keep the drinks cool - just hang them in the 5°C water each day.



In long sections of the river the rapids seem like they will never end. These big rafts are the most popular and fastest way to raft the Grand Canyon.





ADVENTURE



COLORADO RIVER, GRAND CANYON

Oar rafts such as these are a popular and slower way to go through the canyon.

THE ESSENTIALS

Book ahead: Be prepared to book a commercial trip at least 12 months out to get the trip you want. Private trips normally take four to five years or more to obtain a time slot – and only after applying every year!

Be prepared: Summer in the depth of the Canyon can be very hot. The shoulder seasons can bring both hot and cool weather so be prepared. As we've said, the water is cold, all the time.

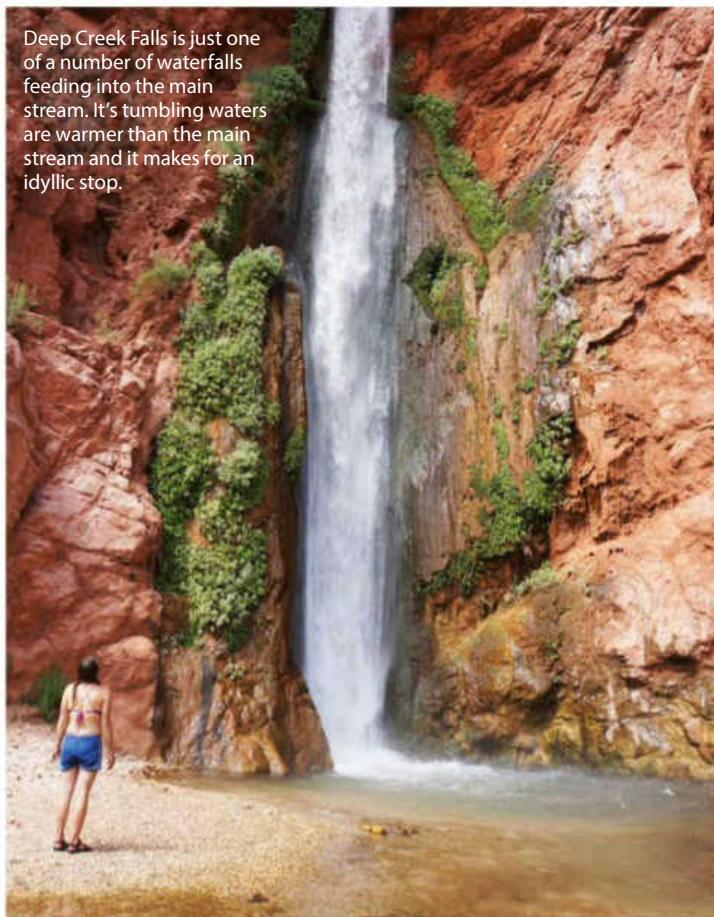
Camping: For details on camping, Park Service regulations etc., visit www.nps.gov/grca/.

Tours: For more details on commercial rafting trips check out www.grandcanyonwhitewater.com.

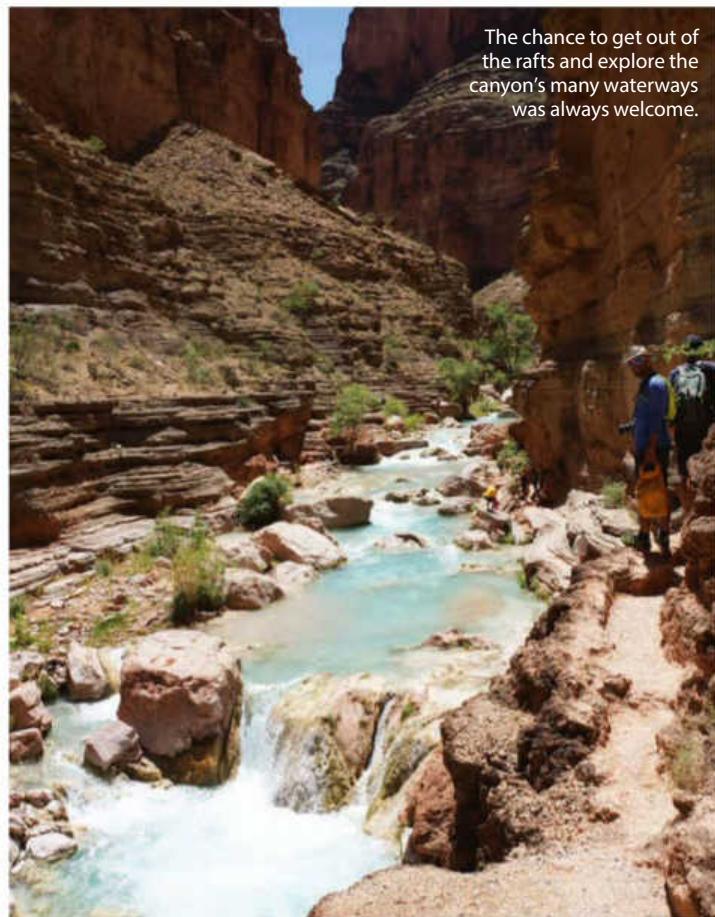
Reading: By far the best guidebook to the river is Belknap's *Grand Canyon River Guide*, 7th edition.



Redwall Cavern is a gigantic cave eroded from the cliff beside the river. Camping is not allowed here but it is a popular stopping point for everyone rafting the canyon.



Deep Creek Falls is just one of a number of waterfalls feeding into the main stream. Its tumbling waters are warmer than the main stream and it makes for an idyllic stop.



The chance to get out of the rafts and explore the canyon's many waterways was always welcome.

controlled by a boatman while the guests hang on.

Around half of the 24,000 people that run the river annually take the powered-raft option. These might not suit the diehard rafter or adventurer, but for most people they are the best compromise between trip duration, cost and actually spending enough time exploring the side canyons and other places along the way. Being bigger powered craft, they are also safer; still, you don't want to fall out, otherwise all bets regarding safety are off!

Powered rafts are only allowed on the river for five-and-a-half months during the relatively high water flows of summer (water is released for electricity generating purposes from Glen Canyon Dam). Private groups have to take part in a lottery system to win a spot on the river, and a permit normally takes five years to obtain.

KEEPING IT COOL

I chose an eight-day/seven-night trip with Grand Canyon Whitewater, one of the oldest and biggest companies operating on the river. This full canyon trip was on one of the big powered rafts, and it turned out to be a great choice that I'd recommend to anyone. And if you have any concerns regarding the noise generated by an outboard motor, I can honestly say I never heard it.

Ripples and rapids begin almost as soon as you leave Lees Ferry, but in this section of the river through Marble Canyon most are relative tame, dropping between five and 10 feet and rated between two and six (Grand Canyon rapids are rated on a scale of 10 – unlike most other rivers in the US and the world). They serve, if nothing else, to get you into the swing of things for the bigger, more hair-raising sections of white water

Pouring out from the bottom of Glen Canyon Dam, the water temperature rarely gets much above 8°C or so.

further downstream.

And the water is cold! Pouring out from the bottom of Glen Canyon Dam (about 12 miles (20km) upstream from Lees Ferry) the water temperature rarely gets much above 8°C or so. Now, on a hot summer's day you'll be looking forward to getting wet, but on a cool day, such as we had for most of our trip, we were near bloody hypothermic and wishing we had brought better waterproof gear.

Not far downstream from Lees Ferry, we drifted under the Navajo Bridges, which had all of us craning our necks in an attempt to check out these two great steel overpasses that are the last car crossings of the canyon till the Hoover Dam, some 350 miles (560km) downstream.

Our first night's camp was at 18 Mile Wash (remarkably at the 18-mile mark) where a large sandbank offered a perfect camp. This is typical of the 220-plus camps designated by the Parks Service, and I've gotta say that the condition of these camps was close to pristine. There are strict rules when rafting the canyon; all solid waste must be brought out with you, while liquid wastes go down the river (yep, including your pee). I've never seen such a well-used place so bloody spotless; we could all learn from it!



The campsites along the route are pristine; it really shows what can be done with a properly organised and well-funded national parks service.

Our second day on the river brought us to the impressive Redwall Cavern, which is a huge chamber eroded out of the side of the canyon. With its natural sweeping arch as a roof and a wide sandy floor, it is a drawcard that stops everyone, but only day visitors are allowed here.

We stopped early that afternoon at Nankoweap Canyon, just below the rapid of the same name. This long stretch of whitewater, rated at an easy two, drops 25 foot in a few hundred yards as the river curls around a large flat delta area, once used by Puebloan Indians to grow grain. High on the cliffs above this rocky river flat are the granaries, hewn out of the cliff face, and while it is a strenuous walk to get to them, the views of the river are absolutely sensational and awe-inspiring.

When the limestone blue waters of the Little Colorado River enter the main stream at the 60-mile mark you enter the Grand Canyon proper. Soon afterwards you are in the 'belly of the beast'. And that's the way it stays for the next three full days.

On our second day in the 'belly of the beast' (day 4) we dropped through numerous rapids including a run of hi-tech, big suckers that started with Unkar Rapid (drops 25ft), Hance Rapid (drops 30ft), Granite Rapid (18ft), Hermit Rapid (15ft), Boucher Rapid (13ft), followed by one of the most dangerous rapids in the canyon, Crystal Rapid (17ft). This stretch of complicated whitewater only appeared in the late 1960s when a major flood down a side canyon dropped big rocks in the centre of the river; how nearly all the rapids in the Grand Canyon were formed. Rated at 10+ at all river levels, this rapid has some deep 'holes' in it and is a very impressive stretch of wild water. We bounced and bucked our way through it all, getting drenched in the process, with adrenalin running at maximum.

Apart from the river and its rapids, each day had us walking to spectacular hidden spots off the main great chasm. Hidden groves of cottonwood trees, small waterfalls, old historic sites, ancient native rock art, narrow chasms and high ridges all vied for attention. Occasionally we'd spy a small group of big horn sheep trotting along some impossibly steep section of rock, or watching us from a lofty prominence.

On our second to last day (day 7), at the 180-mile mark, the river begins cutting through some vastly different geology where volcanic action once spewed lava across the river, creating great dams that have been slowly worn away or diverted around, but still forming an impressive array of rapids including the two-stage 30-foot drop of Lava Falls. This rapid is always rated as a 10+ in technical difficulty, no matter the river height, and everybody went for the short walk along the cliff to get a bird's eye view of the challenge. We bucked our way through it, our boatmen taking a perfect line around the sharp rocks and sheer walls and making it look easy... and as safe as it possibly can be. We were yelling and punching the air for the sheer exuberance of it all!

By the morning of the last day our group wasn't looking forward to finishing. Like the professional boatmen who run this great canyon a dozen or more times a year, we had come to feel like we had a special relationship with the river and the surrounding chasm – a feeling of ownership or, more correctly, stewardship. We were all elated with our adventure but humbled by the experience of this grand display of nature at its finest. It is absolutely awe inspiring. Try it; no matter which way you tackle this mighty stream – on power, oar or paddle rafts, or in a wooden dory – you'll never, ever forget it.



Miss Adventure

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MissAdventure is a community for women that charge the adventure life. This is where we share inspiration, gear, travel ideas and more. We don't care about your age, background or fitness level. If you have the wanderlust spirit, you're one of us.

WORDS CAROLINE PEMBERTON
PHOTOS JUSTIN WALKER & PEDRO PIMENTEL



Once you're fit and psyched, the actual expedition can be just a case of having some memorable fun.



① Expedition Ready

In the second part of our expedition preparation story, we reveal just how important nutrition is to a successful adventure, and how your fitness plays a huge part in this success.



WE'VE ROUNDED UP a handful of experts to give advice on how to prepare, both mentally and physically, for an epic adventure undertaking, whatever it may be.

THE PERSONAL TRAINER

Tashi Gye is not only a dynamic personal trainer who runs Radify Personal Training in Manly, NSW, she's also a fearless adventurer in her own right. If you need to find her and she's not training her clients just look to the sky, sea or snow and there she'll be pursuing her love of skydiving, paragliding, speedflying, surfing, skiing and snowboarding.

Tashi says...

Strength Training

Strength training is repetitive voluntary physical and mental stress you are consciously putting yourself through in order to improve your capacity to be more powerful and have that mental edge. It will prepare you so that you can rely on yourself during the toughest physical parts of your adventure. Practice makes perfect, so ideally you need to be doing three to four sessions a week. Build that

lean muscle mass and strengthen yourself overall and you will rock out the next adventure for sure!

Prevention is key

If you don't stretch enough and learn your way out of any poor movement habits, or you ignore any preexisting injury issues, you will end up with a preventable injury. The worst part is it typically holds back your fitness results and going to the physio two weeks out from your event sucks. Give yourself time in your routine to have a decent warm-up and cool-down either side of your work-out, employ modalities like chiro, acupuncture and massage to keep you on the straight and narrow, and do not train through injury pain! Be smart.

For some people knees, ankles and back seem to have an expiry date earlier than they should. My secret weapons are the foam roller and mobility balls (a.k.a torture devices); get rolling baby!

Get organised early

The details matter and the only way to know you are ready is if you've given yourself the time to get organised. I've learnt the hard way and now I opt out of that "just getting away with it" pressure ➤



with a concise "to-do" list, and another list of items needed for the trip. It always amazes me what I forget until I start jotting it down.

Use a trainer

I may be biased but... get a Personal Trainer! We want to help you. It is especially easy to get you fast results if you have a serious goal. Our skills are designed to help you build your body and get you moving like a superhuman. Having someone that represents your health and fitness is a major contributing factor to how well you regularly focus on your training. I am my clients' biggest fan. We are a team. Their success is my success. I know their body and have learnt how to make them tick and how to avoid weakness. Sometimes it is a love/hate relationship; we love you and you hate us, but don't forget we are all about you.

Write it down

Keep records – your personal bests, one rep max, weight, measurements, distance, time etc.; it is good to know where you're at well before your adventure. Get a diary to write your program in, as well as your progress, and keep a food diary too. Those who do this achieve the best results because it demonstrates consistent focus, determination and self belief. More importantly, it shows you that over time the small changes that take place are working, and you will quickly feel awesome about yourself. Earning a strong sense of self-belief and understanding from this experience is better than any ego-driven performance.

Self assess

After all the prep and training, when I am finally on my adventure and frothing on all the hard work I put in to get there, I check in with myself and do an accurate self-assessment. Adventures involve risk, so be smart, assess your attitude and stay safe. Nothing is worth risking your life for; you need to recognise when fatigue is effecting you or your ego is pushing you too far. When you finally make it to the top of that mountain, take a moment to reflect on the long journey that got you to this real and metaphoric peak.



THE NUTRITIONIST

Kristen Beck is a Registered Nutritionist, Health Scientist and the mother of three mad-keen surfer kids. She's also a keen surfer herself, as well as a swimmer and accomplished distance runner, and a senior lecturer in nutrition and sports science.

Kristen says...

Whether you are setting out to run a marathon, complete a multiday hike or take on any type of endurance event, my biggest piece of nutritional advice is to experiment and fine tune *before* you set out."

Carbohydrates and fats: intensity vs duration

High-intensity cardiovascular exercise (running, swimming, cycling) requires a steady supply of carbohydrates to keep your muscles moving at a rapid pace. Slower, more prolonged exercise (walking, hiking, climbing) uses a combination of carbohydrates and fats to keep you moving. Here are a few tips to keep you going:

- Before you set out, eat a carbohydrate-rich meal, three to four hours beforehand. Basmati rice or sourdough breads are good choices for pre-exercise meals.
- During exercise plan to consume around 30-60g of carbohydrate per hour of exercise (or more if very high intensity exercise continues for longer than three hours).
- Fat intake during exercise is not normally necessary (our bodies tend to have plenty in reserve). Make sure that the fats you eat mostly come from healthy sources such as nuts, seeds, avocados and cold-pressed olive oil.

Save the super-healthy foods for later

It might sound strange coming from a nutritionist, but healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, whole grains and legumes are not always the best pre-exercise food options. When your body is exercising – especially at high intensity – your blood supply is redirected to your mus-

cles (and away from your digestive system) so your body can have difficulty digesting high-fibre foods. This can cause digestive cramping or have you screaming out for the next toilet stop. If you do experience digestive discomfort while exercising, try cutting back on the whole grains, fruits and vegetables before you exercise and consider options such as white Basmati rice or sourdough breads (both are lower GI than standard "white" options).

Hydration really helps

Start hydrating the night before. You'll know if you are well hydrated if your urine is clear or pale yellow and there is plenty of it. Here's what to do:

- Experiment with intake of water or sports drink just prior to exercise. Generally most fit individuals can tolerate 5mL/kg body weight (300-400ml). This is particularly useful if you will have only limited opportunities to consume fluids during exercise.
- A focus on effective rehydration is particularly important for multiday adventures. Start rehydrating as soon as possible after you finish exercising and aim to consume around 150 per cent of your post-exercise fluid deficit (you can measure this by weighing yourself immediately before and immediately after exercise) in the next two to four hours.

Sports drinks and gels

Sports drinks such as Gatorade and Powerade are not nutritionally necessary for exercise duration of less than two hours but they can be a convenient way to supply carbohydrates and electrolytes (along with hydration) for prolonged exercise or in very hot conditions. The other benefit of these drinks is that they actually make you thirstier (because they taste salty) so you tend to drink more (rehydrate more effectively) than if you are just consuming water.

Post-exercise recovery

After prolonged or intense exercise your body takes at least 24 hours to replace your muscle glycogen (your body's storage form of carbohydrates). So for multiday adventure when the time between exercise sessions is less than 12 hours it's really important to start replacing your carbohydrate stores as soon as practically possible after finishing your exercise session. After-exercise snacks should contain a combination of carbohydrate and protein (protein can speed up muscle glycogen recovery). Examples of healthy post exercise snacks include banana smoothie with greek yoghurt, breakfast cereal and milk, sushi, wholegrain toast with peanut or almond butter.

INSPIRATION

In for the long haul

**15 minutes with Jess Douglas,
World 24-hour solo MTB champ**

JESSICA DOUGLAS IS one of Australia's premier mountain bikers, having been a past 24-hour solo MTB World Champion and three-time Aussie 24-hour champ. Jess's life has been all about challenges and she is truly inspiring.

When did your passion for cycling begin?

At the age of four I was given a bike for my birthday; my dad taught me how to ride it there and then and from then on I was a life long cyclist.

I grew up in Geelong. I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma in 1987 and went through a year of chemotherapy. I made it through cancer and this was certainly a catalyst for me and who I am today.

At the age of 18 moved up to Sydney with my new husband Norm. We lived in Sydney for a year, rode bikes everywhere, sold the car and spent all our spare money on bike stuff. We then moved to the Gold Coast where I started to race road and mountain bikes. I wasn't amazing or anything, but I loved it and persevered.

In 1993 we decided to have a child and in January 1994 our daughter Saskia was born. I was still riding and racing but we soon moved back to Victoria to be close to family. The cycling scene took a hiatus for nearly 10 years. We were running at the You Yangs on walking trails, and friends told us about mountain bike trails in the area. This was in December 2005. I did my first race in January 2006 and was hooked.

I realised that I had a lot of work to do but I

applied my one per cent rule from the very beginning. Get out for one ride each week, for one hour, and improve one aspect of my riding by one percent, do this every week, one week, one month at a time... and in a year's time I would have to be better; there is no way I could fail.

Was cycling something you were always into?

Oh yes, from the moment I rode my first bike I always rode.

At age 10, our school held a bike-education program and it culminated in a two-day cycling camp; we rode 30km, stayed the night in Queenscliff and rode 30km back the next day. From that day forward any path, any road, any destination was possible for me, and I was not scared of riding for a long distance.

Then in 1988 I convinced a teacher at my school to form a school group to attend the Great Victorian Bike Ride. We trained and we accomplished nine days of riding. I loved it so much I did it again the next year.

It was not until I was nearly 20 that I found that I also enjoyed competition and racing.

My motivation comes from within, being inspired by others who have performed amazing feats of endurance and not just cycling.

Jess Douglas's commitment and skill have kept her at the top for years.

What is so special about mountain biking as a sport?

It's about being out in nature, soaking in amazing places on a bike and smelling the trees, the flowers, the dirt and hearing the sounds underneath your tyres.

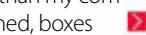
How do you prepare physically and mentally for endurance racing?

It's all in the head. When you choose to believe it is possible, then everything unfolds from there.

My motivation comes from within, being inspired by others who have performed amazing feats of endurance and not just cycling. Having faith that the human body is really amazing [is one thing], but it's my mind that I have to convince.

How do you push on in a 24-hour race?

Racing or riding for 24 hours is a constant engagement of your mind, focusing on what I like to call 'tick boxes'. Prior to a race, I give myself many goals that are measurable and have nothing to do with winning, but they are the elements that allow me to win if I can execute them better than my competition. So the focus becomes honed, boxes



are ticked, goals are attained and forward movement is a constant given.

There is not a huge amount that I allow to clutter my mind, I don't like to talk or engage in much conversation; there is much to concentrate on.

My last 24hr race I had a sticker made for my top tube: 'Faith, Focus, Feel, Flow, Fast, Fight, Finish, First, Family'. These were emotive words that gave me purpose and reminded me every single second what I had to achieve.

What are the biggest challenges in what you do?

Time. There is only so much of it. Each day ticks by and before you know it the year is gone. I wish I could do so much racing, exploring, mentoring, writing, living and, of course, sleeping.

As I am now in my 40s the greatest challenge is actually the time needed to recover well so I can race and be my best again. I am slowly learning how to train smarter and recover quicker; it's an ongoing learning curve.

Tell us about your career highlights and the achievements you are most proud of.

It's been a few years since 2006 when I made the decision to improve and become who I am today on the bike.

In 2009 I did my first Australian 24 Hour Solo championship and won, which led me to going to Canada later that year to race the World Solo champs, in which I came fourth. This hurt my ego, my bank account and made me understand what it would take to be the best. I spent the next 12 months with that final goal of being world champion in 2010, when the race came to Australia.

I backed myself, the field was large and extremely strong, with at least 10 of us capable of winning, and I was pushed the hardest ever, mentally and physically, and I won.

What drives you every day?

I love learning, I love experiences and I love being my best.

It's fun knowing that you never have to be stuck in a rut, you can change your mindset, your life, your situation, your goals... anything, the moment you choose to.

Is fear a factor when you are riding?

Early on I was always on the brakes; even now I berate myself for being on the brakes too much. The fear can be real, like going over the handlebars at speed and hitting your head, so the answer is to go slower and build your skill level gradually.

What personal legacy would you like to leave?

Every day I wake up and look to add value to the



world. We all have a purpose. I have learnt over time that, like it or not, I am a role model, to men, women and children; it's been surprising to recognise this.

Over time I have embraced this role and always actively give, even if it's just by my actions. So a lot of my blog posts are not just race reports, they are real life experiences with racing interwoven into the story.

What other outdoor sports do you do love?

I love hiking and bushwalking; it's a slower version of mountain biking. I love body surfing and the ocean; and taking my dog Max for a walk, any walk, brings me lots of peace.

What tips would you give women who want to get into mountain biking?

The scariest part about beginning is turning up. Wondering whether you have all the right gear, the right bike, the best set-up and are people going to look at you and know straight up that you feel out of place and very self conscious.

There are many women's riding groups out there, and pretty much every MTB club I know of has some form of social ride, even women-only ones that allow you entry into the fold without feeling like a total newbie.

The biggest tip I can give is to reach out, ask for advice, ask for help, go to your local bike shop, contact your local club, ask and just simply keep asking...



What technical tips can you offer?

Learn to find flow, stop smashing down the pedal strokes and milk the trail of its flow. Get your back-side off the saddle more often, which will assist your flow. Increase your forward vision, searching for the next piece of trail, and learn to assess the requirements in advance.

How do you balance training, work and family?

Luckily for me, I am self-managed, self-employed, have flexible work hours and amazing sponsors,



Celebrating victory in the 2012 World Solo 24hr championships in Italy.

It's all in the head. When you choose to believe it is possible, then everything unfolds from there.

including a very, very supportive husband. My daughter is nearly 22 and has lived away from home for nearly three years.

Do you have particular disciplines you follow to keep in peak form?

I am an overly positive person and whilst I am happy to have a whinge or be a bit sad, I always look for a silver lining and there have been enough 'bad times' in my life to show me that every time something devastating occurs, there is something amazing about to happen just around the corner.

The biggest elements that I apply daily to stay healthy are to be excited to wake up. Then eating food like it is medicine for my body; I rarely eat treats that don't offer a nutritional requirement. I don't drink alcohol and I live a vegan lifestyle.

I do something outdoors every single day.

How do you like to relax?

Did I mention I like to sleep?

I love to read motivating biographies, whilst in bed, and fall asleep and tick all the boxes.

My favourite relaxation activity is to take my dog

for a walk down the waterfront with my husband and get a gelati.

Nothing special, just good times.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Along with my one percent rule, there are a few quotes I like to live by: 'Your body can stand almost anything, it's your mind you have to convince'; 'The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, the next best time is now'; and 'If you can dream it you can do it' (Walt Disney).

I truly feel blessed to be living my life, but its not by chance, its a lot of consistent work every single day, it takes belief, it takes failure and disappointment and courage to face your greatest inner demons.

There are no short cuts in success and when I won my first world solo 24hr championship in 2010, I felt like I had cracked the code of life.

Believe.

Action.

Persevere under sufferance.

Never give up.

Fight.

Pain is only temporary.

You must have clear goals in order to achieve, and achieving goals does not equal success or happiness.

There is no destination in life, it really, truly is a journey, every single day; we get the chance to 'do life' again when we wake up. What better gift is there than that?



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IN THE ITALIAN DOLOMITES**

Alpine Exploratory offers a uniquely detailed and up-to-date coverage of trekking routes including the spectacular AV1 in 10 stages. Join us from 15 July to 16 September 2016, guided or self-guided.

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The view from Rifugio Nuvolau, by Mo Richards



Bike Lane

The humble bicycle is still one of the world's most efficient modes of transport, and it's a great device to explore the planet. Whether you've been riding all your life or you're just starting your own two-wheeled adventure, the team at AG Outdoor have you covered for gear reviews, trip news and more.



Don't be left stranded in the bush with a bike that has broken down.



TECH

Don't walk home

WORDS TIM ROBSON

BIKES GIVE US the freedom to roam a long way from home; whether it's on tarmac, gravel roads or bush singletrack, a bike really has the ability to take us the long way around.

Of course, when the adventure is done, we need to get home again. While modern road and mountain bikes are generally pretty reliable devices – especially if they are regularly maintained – they are far more complex than many other pieces of outdoor equipment.

There's an old saying amongst mountain bikers that applies to blacktop riders as well; if you ride in, you ride out. Trust us, walking a 15kg broken-down mountain bike any more than a couple of kilometres is not fun, and nor is pushing your laden touring bike. Besides, a mechanical breakdown can

have serious consequences if you are genuinely out the back of nowhere.

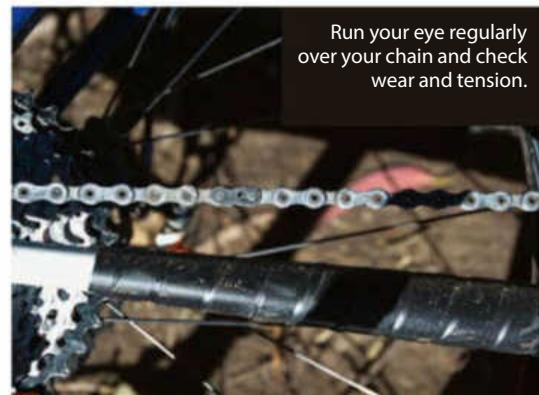
WHAT TO PACK – AND HOW TO USE IT

Back in the 1950s, most bikes were sold with a tool kit that was strapped under the seat. Modern bikes aren't generally sold with anything but a smile and a free service, so it's up to you to equip yourself for any misadventure that may befall you.

The bare minimum you'll need to get even an hour away from home is a pump, a tube and a tyre lever. Add to that a folding multi-tool, and you



A compact tool kit is all you need for most riding scenarios.



Run your eye regularly over your chain and check wear and tension.

have the basis of a portable tool kit that will get you out of most dramas.

There is one big 'but', though; you need to know what you're doing with the tools before you set out.

Your multi-tool needs to have the right sized attachments to suit your bike. One that has an Allen key range from 2mm to 5mm, along with a Torx T25 key and a Phillips head screwdriver will get you going, while one with a chain breaker will get you even further. Look for one that comes with a neoprene or nylon pouch; it'll be safer to stash next to fragile items like tubes in your backpack or saddlebag.

Wrapping a few lengths of duct tape around your tyre lever is a handy way to carry some extra insurance, while a glue-less patch kit and a few zip ties don't hurt, either. A 10-dollar note in the kit can act as a tyre patch in a pinch, as well as paying for after-ride coffee. Stash it all in a hydration pack pocket, or look at a small under-saddle bag that holds your tools, a tube and nothing else – a larger bag just invites you to pack more junk you don't need.

When it comes to using your tools, give your set-up a trial run before you set out. Learn, too, how to remove the wheels from your bike, and

There's an old saying amongst mountain bikers that applies to blacktop riders as well; if you ride in, you ride out



Work your flat tyre off one side using a tyre lever from the opposite side to the valve.



Run your hands along the inside of the tyre to remove the material that caused the flat.



Put a small amount of air into the replacement tube before reinserting it inside the tyre.

When it comes to using your tools, give your set-up a trial run before you set out.

make sure the valve on your spare tube matches the valves on your bike. Don't worry; if you don't know one end of an Allen key from your elbow, read on.

HOW TO FIX A FLAT

So you've managed to aid and abet all of the air escaping from your tyre? All is not lost. If it's the rear wheel that's flat, shift your chain into the smallest rear cog on the rear wheel before removing. Insert your tyre lever on the opposite of the valve (i.e. 180 degrees away) and work the tyre off on one side (pic 1). There's no need to take it off all the way.

Remove the tube and carefully run your fingertips along the inside of the tyre's face; you're looking for something that may have lodged in the tyre like a thorn or a piece of glass, so be very careful (pic 2).

It's faster to simply install a tube that you know is intact while you're on the trail. Don't ditch the old one, though; you can patch it at home and use it again as a spare. Give the new tube a couple of puffs of air (pic 3) and insert, valve first. Reseat the tyre using your fingers, starting at the valve, each hand going opposite directions and working your way around to the other side. Never use anything but your fingers to keep the tube in the tyre; a couple more puffs of air will help if it keeps escaping.

Start pumping up the tyre, but stop after about 20 strokes of your pump. Make sure that the tyre is seated on the rim and the tube isn't escaping,

before pumping it up until it feels the same under a thumb press as your other tyre. Done!

NB: I've based this how-to on a bike with tubed tyres – if you have tubeless tyres and you rip a hole in the sidewall big enough to lose all of your air pressure, you may be able to insert a tube to get you home.

HOW TO FIX A CHAIN

This is a more technical fix, and will require a bit of practice; your local bike shop will have dozens of chains in a bin that you would be able to poach for practice purposes.

The quickest way to get going again out in the bush is by using a split link to repair the break. This link can be inserted without tools, but it does require that the two ends of the chain are 'female', so you may have to grab your chain toll and push out the pin on the broken part to facilitate the chain fix.

The split link is in two halves; one goes on the front and one on the rear. Press them together through the larger hole in the slot and tug to engage. Rotate the part of the chain with the link to the topside of your drivetrain. Grab your rear brake lever to stop the bike from moving, then press down on the pedal as if you're about to ride away. This action will lock the split link in place. And you're good to go!

A note about the split links; you need one that matches the number of rear gears you have on your bike, so if you have a 10-speed rear cassette, you'll need a 10-speed link. Buy a couple and stash

them in your pack or saddlebag – they are incredibly useful.

No split link? You need to remove the piece of busted chain by pushing through the pin on the next usable link using the chain tool. You must not push it all the way out! It needs to come out about seven-eighths of the way, which is enough to hold the two ends together while you work on them.



FAR-OUT FIXES; BRANCH IN THE BAR

If you manage to snap your handlebars out in the wilderness – and your collarbone hasn't been broken in the subsequent fall – this clever trick could get you home. It's essentially a green stick pared down to a thickness where both ends of the broken bar can be jammed over it. A bit of duct tape, and you're mobile again.



Shimano's XTR Di2-equipped test mule was given a thorough testing by Robbo.



The rear derailleur has been beefed up for this application, so is ready for any big hits.



Wires run from shifters to the front and rear derailleurs, via a junction box and battery.

BIKE REVIEW SHIMANO XTR DI2

Digital Dirt

AG Outdoor tests the most expensive group of mountain bike parts on the planet – the fully electronic Shimano XTR Di2 groupset.

Let's get something out the way, right off the bat. The number of you who will end up with any of this gear on your bikes will probably fit in a whitewater raft... after a couple of people have been dumped over the side. But that's not the point.

What we're looking at here is the future of gear shifting on bikes. Shimano has applied four years of knowledge gleaned from building electronic shifting components for road bikes and distilled it into the world's first production off-road electronic groupset.

Known as XTR Di2 (or Digital Intelligence Integrated – obviously Dii isn't a great moniker for mountain biking!), the 22-speed – 11 out the back and two up the front – groupset operates via wires between the shifters on the bars, a junction box, a battery and the front and rear derailleurs. The wires replace the traditional cables, the battery can be hidden out of sight, and the system can be set up via laptop any way you please.

Given its frankly terrifying cost (around \$4000 just for the gear changing components; the bike in these pics would cost around \$12,000), XTR Di2 is a top-line groupset that is meant for cross country racers of Olympic calibre, with access to a service truck, mechanics and post-race massages. It is not a groupset that's designed to

NEWS & PRODUCT BRIEFS



FALLS CREEK TRAILS OPEN NOW

Victoria's Falls Creek Resort has opened a raft of new trails for the 2015/16 summer-season, and now features more than 40km of pristine alpine trails.

There are 11 trails in all, with six new ones to try out. The shuttle operator, Blue Dirt, even offers a three-hour rookie mountain bike rider school. Check out falls creek.com.au for details.



TASMANIA TURNS BLUE

The tiny town of Derby, just an hour and a half from Launceston, is home to one of the most progressive trail networks in Australia, if not the southern hemisphere. Stage three of four has just been completed, with more than 50km of trails ready to go. Bike hire, accommodation and local info is at ridebluederby.com.au.



FUGOO SPORT SPEAKER

With 40 hours of battery life, a water- (to one metre), mud- and shock-proof construction, we'll let you know what we think of the \$250 Fugoo next issue.



The bar-mounted shifting screen shows loads of info and is used to toggle between three shift modes.

...as sure as eggs are eggs, electronics will make their way to cheaper price points. It happened in Shimano's road division, and it'll happen in the mountain bike division too.

run up and down a gravel path once a month.

So why are we trying it? Because as sure as eggs are eggs, electronics will make their way to cheaper price points. It happened in Shimano's road division, and it'll happen in the mountain bike division too.

There are a couple of advantages to electronic shifting. Firstly, gears controlled by 0s and 1s instead of steel braided wires stay in adjustment for longer, despite adverse weather and trail conditions. The chain won't try and jump off the front or rear gears if your cables clog up with gunk on a muddy ride.

Secondly, Shimano has made the interface of XTR completely user-friendly and infinitely adjustable. Rear gears on a traditional system are activated via the right lever, fronts by the left. That's it. No options. With XTR Di2, you can configure the four lever switches to work whichever way you please. Want to swap them over? No worries. Want to shift 11 gears with a long press of one lever button? Done. Not shifting fast enough? Tweak a setting. XTR is almost bewilderingly adjustable.

In fact, you can even run both front and rear derailleurs off one shifter. Shimano calls it Synchro Shift, and it's clever enough to add a front gear change to the menu, even though you're just shifting the rear set.

Shimano has also teamed up with renowned suspension maker Fox to offer yet another level of integration and control. The front and rear

suspension on our tester is connected into the XTR black box, while a small toggle switch on the left handlebar allows both front and rear shocks to be instantly adjusted between soft, medium and firm modes in a heartbeat.

All of the functions can be viewed through a small data screen on the bars, which also allows you to toggle between three shift modes. The first is full manual control, the second is an automatic Synchro shift setting that favours more casual – or less aggressive – trail riding shift characteristics, while the third is reserved for pedal-stomping athletes intent on wringing every last bit of speed from the bike.

So what do we make of a bike that costs more than most of our cars, and has more computing power than our iPad? At the end of the day, bike gears are still a relatively primitive thing, with derailleur systems having remained essentially the same for the last 100 years; a chain is bashed off its cog onto the next by force. XTR Di2 has simply taken the human element out of the job.

Shifts are instant and crisp, and will ram home no matter the torque load they are under. Backing off the pedals slightly to allow a gear to ease home is a thing of the past – simply press a button and it's done.

Front shifting, in particular, has benefitted enormously from electronic interaction. There are few things more frustrating on a modern bike than an out-of-adjustment front derailleur, while dropping a chain off the cogs can do



Front ring shifting is now pure art thanks to the precision of electronics.

quite catastrophic damage to frames. XTR does none of that. It shifts cleanly and easily with zero fuss, no matter when it's asked to do so. It's seamless, effortless and a genuine step forward.

Of course, with many bikes eschewing the front derailleur altogether for a single-chainring set-up, it may be locking the barn door after the horse has bolted for many users, but its development points to a more real-world application in a lower groupset down the track, as well as offering a wider selection of gears with the double-ring front set-up.

We weren't so convinced about the rear. The process to swap the shift paddle assignations around – we wanted the rear paddle to push up the block, instead of coming down – is quite involved, including having to download software to a PC laptop (Mac software isn't ready yet), plug the bike in and run quite a complex series of tasks to get it done.

Even once the setting was affected, the rear shifting, while excellent, wasn't that much more excellent than it is with regular cable-assisted XTR shifting. Compare the two with a cable-operated bike with gunk in the system, however, and the difference would be much more pronounced; the XTR Di2 will theoretically never suffer from deterioration, other than from wearing cogs and chains.

Synchro Shift is an excellent feature, though, and one we used the whole time. A single 'beep' is heard one shift prior to the front derailleur being brought into action, allowing the rider to be ready for it, and it works brilliantly. Holding a shift button down will also force the shifter to keep shifting until it runs out of gears, and the speed of this shifting can be programmed in to suit the rider.

Weight wise, the XTR Di2 system is right on

par with the mechanical version, despite larger derailleurs, a battery and a junction box – the difference is around 50g in Di2's favour overall, depending on a few factors.

Price-wise, the other potential expense of XTR Di2 is the cost of replacement parts. The rear derailleur – traditionally a place that sticks, rocks and branches love to hate – is in excess of \$600 to replace, for example. Snagging wires in a crash is also a worry, though battery capacity isn't; Shimano rates the system as lasting for 300km in worst-case situations (using two front chainrings plus the suspension lockout system). Charging from flat to full takes 90 minutes, though the proprietary plug is a bit of a pest to actually engage.

Does electronic mountain bike shifting have a place in the sport? It's hard to say at this stage. XTR Di2 works exceptionally well, and 300km of range is enough for all but the most dedicated long-haul riders. Will it replace cable shifting in the short term? No. At more than four times the cost of perfectly serviceable XT and nearly twice the cost of mechanical XTR, it's far too expensive and a bit too complex for the average-to-elite Joe/Jo to consider for their own non-factory-backed race bikes.

For long days riding out in the bush, too, a weird glitch that your mechanically minded mate could sort out for you on a cable-actuated bike might be a ride stopper with electronic stuff.

Electronic shifting is here to stay, though. Shimano's bitter rival, SRAM, has just released a wireless road bike groupset, while we will definitely see off-road Di2 drift further down the affordability tree as the years roll on. If you want it now, save your pennies – you'll need all of them.



AIR SHIFTING

In 2000, Shimano tried a different method of alternative shifting that involved not electronics, but air. Known as Shimano Airlines, the system was based on a single derailleur with two separate shifters for up and down shifts, all on a seven-speed cassette. Intended for downhill bike use, the system was prohibitively expensive and limited in its application, especially in cold climates. Only a handful of systems made their way to Australia.



TESTED // BMC GRANFONDO GF01 ULTEGRA

RRP \$5999 www.bmc-switzerland.com/int-en/

Tested by JUSTIN WALKER

LONG DISTANCE ROAD cycling is known under many terms – endurance, touring, sportive and also Gran Fondo – and it is this last description that forms part of the model name of Swiss brand BMC's Granfondo GF01 – and hints at its design brief. For those of us who are super-keen on getting out on the road, but are not hardcore racers, a bike that offers a slightly more relaxed geometry (think: taller headtube, bringing the bars up so the rider is not so bent-over) and compliant ride is a sensible choice. And this doesn't mean you cannot ride fast – as BMC proves with its GF01.

The BMC GF01 frame is identical to the one the Swiss team's riders use to race the Classics (one-day races in Europe), of which the cobblestone-riddled Paris-Roubaix is one. These events are tough on bikes, primarily due to the changing surfaces on the route, so BMC was keen to design a bike that both remained fast and competitive on smoother sections, but also muted the energy-sapping effects of riding over cobblestones, to keep

their riders as fresh as possible over the course of the race.

The GF01 frame is typically Swiss – function first, fashion second – and is seriously burly. The beefy head tube, immense down tube, wide bottom bracket and large chainstays are deceptive when it comes to the overall weight of the frame. At 1kg (for the size 56 tested here) you get a lot of lateral and torsional stiffness, without sacrificing vertical compliance (comfort, in other words). BMC has achieved this "holy grail" via its Tuned Compliance Concept (TCC) technology, in conjunction with a series of "kinks" in different areas of the frame – notably those areas that cop the brunt of feedback from the road. The fork blades, chainstays, seatstays and the seatpost all feature these kinks, with the aim being to disperse the shock of impact from the road via increased flex at these points. Further damping the vibrations and bumps – the GF01 rolls on tall Continental Grand Prix 4 Season 28c tyres (most road bikes run either 23c or 25c).

The drivetrain and brakes are pure Shimano Ultegra. This test bike is the 2015 model; the MY16 models will all run disc brakes but, as we've already confirmed through testing, these "traditional" brakes still pack plenty of stopping punch. The Shimano Ultegra groupset comprises a 50/34 compact crankset and 11/32 cassette, with all that power and torque pushed through a BB86 press-fit bottom bracket. Interestingly (or impressively) the GF01 features BMC's DTi (Dual Transmission integration), which allows you to easily swap between mechanical and electronic groupsets; remove the external cable stops and you can plug them up (with the supplied plugs) and utilise the internal routing for the electrickery.

The GF01 has only just landed in AG Outdoor's bike shed after an excellent bike-fit from Adrian at Cycle Spot, in Mona Vale NSW (www.cyclespot.com.au), but even after a few bedding-in rides, we can see this highly pedigreed roadie becoming a favourite with the test crew. In our next issue (Mar-Apr 2016), following a few months of serious riding, we will have a far more comprehensive report on the GF01's on-road performance.



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Road Trippin'

Welcome to *AG Outdoor*'s Road Trippin' section. Vehicle-based family touring and adventuring in Australia and New Zealand is easy and loads of fun, whether you drive a sedan, station wagon, compact SUV or 4WD.



ROAD TRIP // COOBER PEDY, SA

The Painted Heart

Head inland, outback South Australia to be precise, for one of the best bush trips of your life.

WORDS MARCUS CRAFT PHOTOS THOMAS WIELECKI

TALES OF GRAND outback adventure often fail to mention the flies. The flies and the heat. Yet they are your constant companions out in Australia's red-hot heart. Out here, they are facts of life: you will be abuzz with flies (hundreds at all times, drinking the moisture from your skin, hair, corners of your mouth and around your eyes) and you will bake in the skin-searing, spirit-sapping dry heat.

But that's part of the fun.

The outback and, further inland still, the desert, are welcome challenges. Endure them and you enjoy them.

THE PLACE OF PRECIOUS STONES

When we flew into Coober Pedy, the surrounding landscape was an intriguing sight: seemingly barren, sparsely vegetated but peppered with dark, ominous holes. Those holes are the most obvious signs here of exploration for what have been at

times this region's lifeblood: opals.

Coober Pedy is a stunning oddity: a quirky mish-mash of Indigenous influence and migrant culture through the decades, sprinkled with the trappings of modern-day life, replete with fast food, satellite TV and brand-new dual-cab utes.

We landed on the small airstrip just outside of town, swiped at the first of many thousands of flies and marvelled at the intense heat. We threw our gear in an awaiting Mazda BT-50 dual-cab XTR, bush-ready with bullbar and snorkel, and set off.

The search for opals here, about 846km from Adelaide, has been going on for more than a century; the first opal claim was pegged in February 1915. Living conditions above ground are so harsh that many years ago, some people started building their homes below ground and residing there, where the temperature is reportedly a constant 21 degrees Celsius – so you really can't blame them.

But we weren't here to discover precious gemstones; we were here to tackle some of the toughest outback driving in Australia.

Our convoy, heading north for Oodnadatta, had only hit about 9km on the tripmeter when the bitumen ended and the fun – and gravel – started.

South Australia's bewitching outback stretched away from us in all directions, beckoning.

THE INLAND SEA

It's a mixed-up world out here, a captivating blend of gibber plains and sand hills; sometimes a moon-scape; sometimes a stark blue sky over rocky outcrops. It hasn't rained here in six years.

Our route led through cattle stations north of Coober Pedy, including the imposing Mt Barry Station, which begins about 100km north of the dusty town. We rumbled over cattle grids on ➤



Every old car, fallen-down sign, and lonely dirt road tells a story in this part of Australia.

BUILT FOR ADVENTURE



The modern-day dual-cab ute is the greatest all-rounder there is – and it just keeps getting better with every model released. Utes are now more refined, safer and more capable off-road than ever.

Mazda's BT-50 has been winning over buyers and motoring journalists for years; the only thing anyone could agree on as a flaw in the previous model was its 'smiley' front end. Well, now that's been replaced with a tough, chunky, squared-off presence, so the new BT-50 looks better, tougher, than its predecessor.

Off-road, this BT-50 went everywhere it wanted to – and it did it in comfort and with style. We drove it over heavily corrugated dirt tracks, flirted with gibber plain traverses and took on super-heated sand, all the while feeling neither rattled nor jolted nor otherwise out of sorts as you would in utes of not-so-old.

With 4-Low mode and electronic aids selected (Hill Descent Control included), this ute virtually drove itself over every off-road challenge we pointed it at. Choose the line, choose the gear and away you go.

The 3.2L five-cylinder engine – producing an outback-ready 147kW@3000rpm and 470Nm@1750-2500rpm – is nicely mated to the six-speed auto, producing plenty of real-world power and low-down grunt when it matters.

It's no disappointment on gravel or bitumen, offering a car-like ride: stable, predictable and comfortable.

We drove along sandy creek-beds and up and down deeply rutted washouts. No problem. We drove it up a rocky hillside as high as we could until the severity of the slope screamed at us to stop.

So, the BT-50 proved itself on and off the road.

New optional gear includes a great Hema Maps package which you'd be crazy not to order.



our way.

Suffice to say, this is no country for city slickers. If you don't have what it takes to survive, to thrive, out here, then you're found out pretty quickly. Looks don't count out here; ability does; reliability does.

Journeys between towns are adventures unto themselves, through washouts and over corrugations in a hard shower of scattered rocks. You could tackle these trips in a 2WD, sure, but a 4WD offers much more in the way of comfort and sure-footedness.

Our BT-50 had no problems.

Most of the major tracks we drove during this bush jaunt were in pretty good nick and the sec-

tion we did of the 620km-long Oodnadatta Track, stretching between Marree and Marla, was no different. But venture off-road and it takes judicious driving to avoid punctures; there are sharper-than-nails rocks, as well as the short, strong shafts of broken, pointed sticks to contend with.

After 230km, we entered Oodnadatta, the "hottest and driest" town in Australia. We pulled into the legendary Pink Roadhouse – \$2/litre for diesel – and tucked into some burgers.

Later, a perfectly cloudless blue sky framed a huge cloud of dust frozen mid-air, as we stood in the scorching midday sun, sipping water, while a police officer performed low-speed doughnuts around a dusty claypan in our BT-50.

There's a raw delight to driving in the outback. Nothing like it. The scenery is incredible and ever-changing, as is the terrain.

The South Australian cop was doing gentle circle-work on part of the "6 x 4 trail" we were having fun on, just outside of Oodnadatta – and he was having a great time.

Only minutes before, we'd seen the police Land-Cruiser approaching our position from a kilometre away, gliding across a rich-red sandy track. We saw all of this because we were stuck. Door-sill deep in sand, atop a dune. Bogged.

Don't get me wrong: the BT-50 can go almost anywhere. It took two experienced but easily distracted travellers to prevent it conquering this obstacle. We'd relied on speed to tackle a small but steep-ish dune and had come unstuck at a mound of deep sand just before the dune's crest. Corrugations in the sand at the top – caused over time by drivers with over-inflated tyres doing just what we had done – had forced us into a terminal bounce, which had then drained all of our momentum. The more we tried to gun out of it, the deeper the wheels dug.

We deserved the strife: we'd been running our tyres at 30psi which, by my reckoning, was almost twice as much air as we should have had in them. And with temps tickling the upper 40s at that stage, our tyres would have been nudging 35psi or more.

The support crew swung into action, dropped our tyre pressures and snatch-strapped us out in no time.

We headed for our overnight accommodation at Arkaroola Station, about 90km south-west of Oodnadatta and 150km north of Coober Pedy, stopping at a lookout to marvel at the wonder of the Painted Desert, an ancient inland sea bed so named because of the brightly coloured orange, yellow and white shale on the hills.

Standing there, soaking up the atmosphere, the Painted Desert looked unreal, like a massive painting perched in front of us, close enough to touch. Photographers and videographers in our party were working overtime, making the most of the stunning backdrop this amazing natural attraction provided.

After ditching our gear in our tents, we accepted an invitation from Arckaringa's owner Paul to test out the BT-50s on an improvised 4WD course along twisting, sandy tracks, through dry river beds, and up and down washed out and rocky creek banks.

The BT-50s looked the goods and proved





their mettle, but Paul still refused to commit when we asked him if he was going to ditch his Toyota for a Mazda.

A JOURNEY WELL WORTH MAKING

That night, we slept under billions of stars at Arckaringa. The station covers 2745 square kilometres and is rated by the South Australian Pastoral Board to run up to 2100 head of cattle. It has on-site cabins and camping and it really is a bloody top joint.

The next morning, as we drove out of the station in convoy, a wedge-tailed eagle wheeled about in the sky high above us.

On the return trip to Coober Pedy, we pulled off to the side of the track to tackle a bit of serious rock crawling. We didn't want the adventure to end. It was low-range fun on the steep climbs and Hill Descent Control heaven on the descents.

There's a raw delight to driving in the outback. Nothing like it. The scenery is incredible and ever-changing, as is the terrain. The light is eye-scaldingly bright. During the day, the sky is crisp and clear blue; the night sky is a black blanket, peppered and aflame with bright, twinkling stars.

After more than 500km of outback adventure, every bloke in our touring crew had a Big Sky smile.

We've been out here loads of times but that doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things because the landscape and light, the blue-sky brightness and the sun-bleached sand, the people and the places never fail to surprise, never fail to amaze.

ADVENTURE VEHICLE TEST

Toyota HiLux SR5



Price: \$55,990 (as tested with auto transmission)

More info: www.toyota.com.au

Toyota's HiLux has been the biggest selling ute in Australia for many years. But with the dual-cab 4WD ute market now more competitive than ever, this latest all-new HiLux needs to produce something special to maintain that position. Toyota is confident its new load-hauler will be equally at home transporting the adventurous family as it is on the worksite.

THE VEHICLE

The HiLux is available in a huge number of variants but, for the adventurous family, it is the dual-cab options, including this top-tier 4.0-litre V6 SR5 on test, that will be the focus of attention.

The Toyota HiLux SR5 is available in both diesel (a new 2.8-litre powerplant) and the 1GR-FE 4.0-litre V6 petrol engine, which is an update to the previous model's V6. The tweaked V6 boasts improved fuel economy (12/100km), lower emissions (it is Euro V emissions compliant), more grunt (175kW/376Nm) and a higher towing capacity of 3000kg, compared to the previous model. The drivetrain has also been beefed up, with new front/rear differentials and a stronger output shaft. Also strengthened are the vehicle's

torsional rigidity (up 20 percent thanks to more body welds, thicker panels, etc.), the tub (now stronger) and other chassis components.

The SR5 is the hero model in the HiLux range and as such packs plenty of goodies for the asking price, but even at the lower model levels, the specs are high. Standard HiLux kit includes: aircon, cruise control, seven airbags, reversing camera (ute-tray only, not tray-based models – it is an accessory option for those), tilt-and-reach adjustable steering wheel, 80-litre fuel tank, auto-leveling headlights, audio display, driver aids (vehicle stability control, active traction control, trailer sway control, hill-start assist), ABS brakes and a large in-dash audio display screen. As you go up the model list, you get more features again, with the SR5 the hero model. The SR5 cops 18-inch alloy wheels, auto-leveling LED headlights, sports bar, smart entry/start, lots of chrome highlights, climate-control aircon, 4.2-inch in-dash multimedia display, extra 12V power outlets, downhill assist control (SR5 auto only), the option to add leather accents and power to the driver's seat, and more. Yes, the SR5 pricing is high, but no more than its competitors, and you get a long list of features for your money. Of course, looks and appearances are one thing – in the world of dual-cab 4WD utes, you need to back up your appearance with performance...



THE DRIVE

We had limited time with the SR5 4.0-litre V6 so focused on replicating a "regular week" for such a vehicle if owned by an outdoor-oriented family. The majority of driving was in an urban environment, with the vehicle also loaded up with mountain bikes and enough gear for an adventurous weekend away. The first thing any prospective owner needs to do with the HiLux SR5 is banish any preconceptions (or memories) of this as a rough-riding "tradies' rig". Toyota has done a brilliant job of ensuring the HiLux – even when empty of a ride-settling load in the ute-tray – delivers a respectable around-town driving experience. The steering has been tweaked to ensure less turns are needed to navigate tight parking spaces and streets, and the suspension strikes a great balance between offering a supple ride around town when the ute is empty, while still providing decent handling when you've loaded up all your gear in the back. Of course, with a load in the tray the ride is more settled – it is a ute, with rear leaf spring suspension after all – but even when empty, it is more than bearable.

Performance-wise, the 4.0-litre V6 lacks for nothing, with all that power and torque being funneled through a smooth-shifting six-speed automatic gearbox. Fuel economy will never be a

large-capacity, six-cylinder petrol engine's strongpoint but, with less lead-foot driving and that 80-litre fuel tank, the touring range of the SR5 in petrol form is still quite adequate.

Off-road, the SR5's traction controls, improved wheel articulation and rear diff-lock mean this ute can go anywhere you want to; for most adventurous families, who will be heading to a national park or state forest campground, the SR5 is more than capable enough to get you, your family and all your gear there and back again.

THE VERDICT

The HiLux has been Australia's favourite ute for decades and this all-new model should ensure it stays at the top of the sales list. For those looking at a vehicle to perhaps cross the Simpson Desert, travel around Australia, or tackle Cape York, we'd opt for the 2.8-litre diesel variant (priced at \$57,990 for the auto version).

For those who prefer micro-adventures (a weekend, or week at longest) we'd look seriously at this punchy 4.0-litre V6 model. With its combination of on-road comfort, safety, passenger- and load-space, reputation for reliability, enormous dealer network, and serious off-road capability, the HiLux SR5 V6 is worth serious consideration.

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THE
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PADDLING THROUGH THE AGES

Canoeing is just as relevant today as it was when these versatile vessels were first used the world over, many thousands of years ago.

WORDS DEAN MELLOR
PHOTOS TRAVIS FRENAY, JUSTIN WALKER, MATTHEW ROYDS



TRACING THE PRECISE origin of the canoe isn't easy – after all, the earliest examples of this versatile paddleboat date back thousands of years, and were used in various guises by people from all over the world.

The word canoe is derived from the Carib Indian 'kenu,' which translates as dugout. Dugouts are made from the hollowed-out and shaped trunks of trees, and this method has been employed the world over for millennia. In fact, the oldest-known boat still in existence, the Pesse canoe, is a dugout-style canoe; it is housed in the Drents Museum in Assen in the Netherlands, and carbon dating suggests it was constructed between 8040–7510 BC.

Bark canoes – with a ribbed wooden frame usually skinned with light and waterproof Birch bark – were popular among Native Americans. This lightweight design was ideally suited to travelling the many lakes and rivers of North America, as it could be used to transport cargo and could be easily portaged when necessary.

The early European immigrants appreciated the versatility of the canoe and used the vessel extensively in the exploration of North America. The French are credited with setting up the first

ever canoe factory in Quebec, some time around 1750. It built canoes used by fur traders, some of which were big enough to carry up to 12 people in addition to cargo exceeding two tonnes.

Canoe enthusiast and founder of Paddle & Portage Canoes, Travis Frenay, is amazed by the history of the canoe, and the variety of different craft that were developed around the globe. "It looks like many different cultures around the world had their own versions of a canoe, whether it was a bark canoe or a dugout canoe, a woven-thatch canoe or any of the above," says Travis. "Some were paddled sitting, some were paddled kneeling, some were paddled standing, and it's just mind-blowing how so many cultures around the world solved the problem of how to float down a river with different solutions."

HORSES FOR COURSES

A traditional canoe is called a C-boat, or a Canadian. Unlike a K-boat (a kayak) a C-boat has an open-top design, is usually around 5m (17-feet) long, and is paddled by one or two canoeists, each with a single-blade paddle.

Modern canoes are made in a wide range of styles and from a wide range of materials. The style

of canoe will depend on what it's to be used for, where it will be paddled and how many occupants it will carry. Regardless whether it will be paddled on still water or whitewater, for short or long distances, or to carry one or more people, the general design of many modern canoes isn't that far removed from those developed by the early settlers in North America.

"Some boats are as true to the traditional design as you could get," explains Travis Frenay. "The early explorers in the US took a page from the book of the American Indian and they made their Prospectors – a hull shape that looked like it would handle moving water, flat water and everything. The Prospector was such a successful design... [it] has been copied by many different canoe manufacturers today. Nobody owns the name Prospector and therefore so many different manufacturers have a Prospector in their fleet. We•no•nah Canoe, who I sell for, I believe they took their plans from the actual Prospector canoe in the Smithsonian Museum, and modelled theirs after that."

When canoes were used to ferry trade, some examples grew to mammoth sizes. "If you look at some of the war canoes launched in Canada, they



Left to right: building composite canoes can be a hi-tech process. Here, builders fit a vacuum bag into a canoe mould; canoes make great load-luggers; ...and can take you anywhere; wooden canoes are still made by keen paddlers today.



A traditional canoe is called a C-boat, or Canadian. A C-boat has an open-top design, is around 5m long, and is paddled by one or two canoeists, each with a single-blade paddle.

were called Voyager canoes, they would seat up to 25 or 30 people," exclaims Travis. "Those are the true freighter boats that the prospectors would go out and collect their goods for trade, whether it be gold or fur pelts or whatever, and they would bring it back to these outposts where they'd load it into the Voyager canoes which would take the entire haul back to the trading posts."

Although canoes are not used for hauling freight these days, there are certainly different designs specifically aimed at fulfilling different purposes. The length, beam (width) and depth of a canoe, as well as its hull and side profiles, all have big impacts on its performance, the way it paddles and its suitability for different situations.

The longer a canoe, for example, the faster it will travel, the more cargo it will carry and the straighter it will track; the trade-off, however, is less

manoeuvrability than a shorter canoe. Likewise, narrow canoes tend to be faster through the water than wide canoes, but they offer less stability. And the more depth a canoe has, the better it will handle waves, but the more susceptible it will be to crosswinds.

When choosing a suitable canoe, a paddler must first ask where they're going to be paddling it. "The biggest thing is to look at the type of water that they want to paddle in, and to choose a design that suits that style of water," advises Travis. "Some boats are designated flatwater only, some are designated whitewater only – if they think they might do a little bit of both then they'd choose a hull shape that suits both."

"The second thing they really want to look at, besides their budget, is what type of durability are they after. Do they want a canoe that they don't

have anything to worry about, or is weight a concern and they're willing to accept something with a little bit less durability for something that's easier to lift on and off the vehicle and out of the garage?"

DIFFERENT MATERIALS

While the general designs of canoes are not that far removed from those that have been used for centuries, the materials from which they are made have certainly changed a lot.

"Manufacturers, it seems that they're continually experimenting with materials," says Travis. "I mean every time I find out about some new crash-hot textile I send it to We•no•nah and say, 'Hey, have a look at this', because they're always experimenting with new designs."

"There was a new material a few years ago that was a fibreglass crossed with Innegra, which is another known fabric, and then it had a vapour deposition of aluminium on to it, so it shimmered like a fish skin; they called it Barracuda, and it was originally invented, not for canoes, just designed as a flash, bling looking fabric. We•no•nah thought, 'Well, let's try and make boats out of it', and they did."

Matthew Royds spent a few months crafting this magic wood canoe but the end result speaks for itself.



Just like many manufacturers of products related to outdoor activities, it seems that canoe makers are always striving to find some new, lightweight and super durable substance. "There's a new material that's just come out of Canada called TuffStuff," says Travis. "It's made by Nova Craft, and it's a combination of Innegra and basalt; I didn't even know you could make a fabric out of basalt but it turns out you can."

"I've seen hemp canoes, certainly carbon-fibre, Kevlar, carbon and Kevlar mixtures, different grades of fibreglass... I certainly don't think manufacturers rule out anything until they've tried it. You know, if they can lay up a boat in the material, then they'll get in there and have a go."

DO IT YOURSELF?

For as long as the canoe has been around, people have been making their own, in all sorts of styles and out of all sorts of different materials. After all, making your own fibreglass canoe is a relatively simple affair; jump on Google, hire a mould, buy some fibreglass, resin, talcum powder, rollers and brushes, and give it a go.

"There are lots of people still glassing their own boats," says Travis. "I'm approached occasionally by people who want me to import material for them; they ask if I can get 60-inch wide Kevlar and things like that so that they can make their own boats."

Not everyone takes the simple route, however. "I'm amazed by the number of people I've met who've made [wooden] canoes," says Travis.

"...mid-tide in one of the arms off one of Sydney's estuaries or rivers, no boat can get in there except you and your canoe... and you have this beautiful spot to yourself."

"They'll say, 'Oh, yeah, I made a cedar strip canoe,' and I say, 'How did you do that?' 'Oh, I bought some plans from the US and I had them shipped in and, yeah, it took me a while but I made one.' They built the frame, then steamed the strips and everything, and made themselves a kit boat!"

WHAT'S THE ATTRACTION?

Travis Frenay not only knows a hell of a lot about canoes, he's fiercely passionate about everything to do with paddling, saying he's happy in a kayak or on a stand-up paddleboard, or even a surf ski. "Basically anything that I can get my hands on I'll paddle," he laughs, "but I think I like canoeing because of a lot of different factors combined."

"First of all it's the capacity; the different things you can easily carry in the boat."

"Secondly, it's the way in which you paddle [a canoe]; as opposed to just using one stroke and just going forward, I'll cruise along the banks sneaking in and out under the trees, going under overhanging branches and checking out lizards and snakes on the bank and things like that, and in the process of doing so you're utilising, at any point

in time, 10 to 15 different strokes just to be in complete control of the boat."

"So you're constantly challenging your skillset to maintain control, in the wind and waves, against all the obstacles on the bank, if there's current, all of those things. I just feel it really keeps you in tune with what's going on around you, with what the environment's chucking at you, and what the weather is doing."

"I also find because a canoe has so little draft in the water, and you don't have a rudder hanging down to catch on weeds, you can go into places that you can't get to in any other type of vessel... mid-tide in one of the arms off one of Sydney's estuaries or rivers, no boat can get in there except you and your canoe, and you just go up this tidal arm of some creek and you have this beautiful spot to yourself and it's just really relaxing. While you're there you can sit down on the floor of your boat, or lie down and have a little nap, have a sandwich, whatever; there's something just quite historic and romantic about it that I'm really drawn to."

Sounds like it's a good time to go for a paddle...

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TESTED // THE NORTH FACE FUSE FORM DOT MATRIX JACKET

RRP \$330 www.thenorthface.com.au Tested by JULIE HANCOCK

AFTER TOO MANY years of hiking in soggy, humid conditions in jackets that make me feel like I'm wearing a wet garbage bag, I was very keen to trial The North Face's Fuse Form Dot Matrix jacket which uses the company's innovative FuseForm technology (a construction method that fuses light, strong fibres in specific areas of the garment, meaning less weight and fewer seams) and its HyVent 2.5L technology. Despite its technical specs (which I'll get to later), this sleek rain jacket looks mighty fine. It's also incredibly light, which makes it the perfect jacket to keep rolled up in the pack for that wild weather day.

The clever folk at TNF have continued to forge new territory with the HyVent 2.5L material used in this jacket by applying a polyurethane

coating with a **print matrix**, which in turn acts as a dry-touch, half-layer coating. The 2.5L half-layer actually adds to the durability and comfort by physically separating the polyurethane coating from the skin.

I got to try it out on a 20km trek in the Gold Coast hinterland, which proved the perfect environment for this baby, even raining on cue.

The first thing I noticed was that, thanks to the FuseForm tech, number of seams and lighter, but stronger fabric, the jacket was much lighter next to my skin (eliminating the need for the old mesh layer of previous jackets). The fit is close without being stifling and it gave great movement even with a large daypack on my back. There is also a

distinct lack of fussy adornment (which I liked) leaving only the necessities; pockets that are deep enough to fit my phone and some trail mix, and a zip that is mercifully easy to manoeuvre.

Nifty toggles ensured the hood (with built in peak) stayed snug around my head, keeping me nice and dry and the rain out of my eyes.

The length of the jacket ensured that if I needed to climb up an embankment or lift my arms for any reason, the hem stayed firmly below my hips, keeping me warm and dry. This feature will really come in to its own come the spring ski season. And at a reasonable \$330, you are getting great TNF technology at a good price.

HOT FEATURES

FUSEFORM TECH
MINIMALIST DESIGN
LIGHT AND TOUGH



LONG TERM TESTED // SUUNTO TRAVERSE

RRP \$549.95 www.suunto.com

Tested by JUSTIN WALKER

SINCE OUR INITIAL report on the new Suunto Traverse, the watch has seen plenty of use, as a training aid for this reviewer as well as a navigational aid for bushwalks and mountain bike adventures in the outdoors.

As we stated in our first review, with the abundance of GPS watches now on the market, any new arrival really needs to stand out to be noticed. And by stand out, we mean it must offer something unique, or be more proficient than its competitors. So far, with two months of testing, the Traverse has done a pretty good job of differentiating itself from its competitors.

The Traverse's long-life battery has been one of the most impressive features of the watch. The fact that you don't have to worry about running out of juice on a two- or three-day bushwalk, where you are using your watch as your main navigational aid, cannot be overstated. Combine that with the

HOT FEATURES
EASY TO USE MENU
ROBUST BUILD
CONNECTIVITY

navigational accuracy of the Traverse – thanks to its use of both GLONASS and GPS satellite networks – and its robust build and simple reliability, and you have a navigational timepiece that could easily become your go-to for directional challenges in the outdoors.

I am a bit of a tech-head, so being able to check everything from steps taken, total ascent and overall speed of a day's trekking has been awesome. A lot of this info is courtesy of Suunto's impressive FusedAlti tech, a combo of satellite altitude and barometric pressure that ensures it is super accurate. As well, I can be unintentionally careless with gear; I have grimaced more than once after banging the watch into a rock or tree branch, but thankfully its raised anodised stainless-steel bezel and the tough casing (made from composite material) has seen it come through pretty much unscathed.



After two months with the Traverse, I have come away very impressed. Suunto has entered a highly competitive market with a product that delivers what most adventurous travellers are after: a multipurpose navigational timepiece that is very easy to use and very tough. The ease of operation starts with the Activities menu and the easy-to-see watch face (handy for when you're following your breadcrumb trail back to civilisation) and continues with the multipurpose buttons, the cool Moves-count software and app, and the smartphone connectivity. Add in the tough construction and 100m waterproof rating, and the competitive price makes the Traverse an appealing option when it comes to the GPS/sportswatch market.



TESTED // OSPREY TRANSPORTER

RRP \$144.95 (130L) www.outdooragencies.com.au

Tested by JUSTIN WALKER

HOW TECHNICAL CAN the design brief for a duffel bag be? The answer is: not very. The only thing you need to worry about when looking to buy one of these ubiquitous load-luggers is that it will fit all your gear in, said gear stays protected, and it is as easy to carry as it is to stuff in the back of your vehicle (or on the back of a yak). Yep, it is simple, and that's what makes duffel bags the primary choice for adventurous travellers: they are basic, robust and reliable.

Osprey's Transporter (the 130L is tested here – weighing just 1.25kg unladen) sticks to the tried-and-true duffel formula, enhanced with Osprey's expected high level of innovation, design

and construction. A large main-zipped opening, tough base (900-denier material), and handy side-zipped compartments ensure there's plenty of room and protection for your kit. Osprey also adds versatility with the straps being able to be repositioned to run through the duffel's slider buckles, so you can carry it as a backpack. It sounds a bit complex but it's dead easy to adjust and makes a huge difference if you're walking between flights/transport.

As well as the main carry straps, there are two handles at either end, plus webbing attachment points so you can be sure the pack is secured when it needs to be during transportation. The lid even has a padded/zipped section for laptop/tablet storage – something very handy for in-vehicle packing, so you won't stress out so much about your laptop sitting on top of the luggage inside the bag, unprotected if more bags are thrown on top of it.

With 130 litres of storage capacity, the Transporter has been my recent go-to for long, multi-activity based trips, where I need to pack not

- HOT FEATURES**
- CARRYING SYSTEM
- INNOVATIVE DESIGN
- LIGHT WEIGHT

only clothing but also equipment such as bike helmets and shoes, hiking boots, water bladders, etc. All this gear is bulky and soon reduces your luggage's capacity to actually carry the clothes you need. With the 130L Transporter, this has never been an issue.

There are two features I am really impressed with on the Transporter. The first is the zipped lid that – unlike most other duffels – opens to one (short) side of the top, providing excellent access to the Transporter's interior space for being able to see all the area you have at your disposal, and for easy packing. The second feature I love is the fact it can be stored inside itself; one of the side compartments actually doubles as the Transporter's storage. You simply tuck it all in the zipped opening (similar to stuffing a sleeping bag, really), and then zip it all up. Nice!

The Transporter represents great value for money and for something so simple, it combines some nice welcome technical touches, such as the ability to carry it backpack-style, with a light overall weight and a robust design.



TESTED // LEATHERMAN SIGNAL

RRP \$285 www.leatherman.com.au

Tested by JUSTIN WALKER

WHETHER YOU END up using it or not, a multitool should always be one of the first things thrown in your bag when you're heading off on a trip, because you just never know...

There are a number of multitools on the market but it is Leatherman – and its variety of models – that has become the ubiquitous choice. And even when you think there's no way that more features could be packed into this compact tool, Leatherman's Signal seems to prove you wrong.

The Signal includes 16 tools, and adds in a few additional survival-based implements as well. The spec list is impressive – included in the Signal's

compact dimensions (114mm closed length; 212.6g weight) are: needlenose and regular pliers, replaceable wire cutters and hard-wire cutters, knife, saw, hammer (yes, hammer!), wire stripper, an awl (with thread loop), can and bottle openers, 1/4-inch hex bit driver, 1/2- and 3/16-inch Phillips head screwdrivers, 1/4-inch and 3/16-inch box wrenches and a carabiner. All of these tools are very easy to access and simple to operate (the screwdrivers just pull out and are then re-inserted in the opposite way to access the different sizes). The blades all lock out so you won't slice a finger, and some of the tools can be used singlehandedly.

All this is pretty cool, but even more so is the addition of a safety whistle, diamond-coated blade sharpener and a very handy ferrocerium (or ferro) rod for fire lighting. For this tester – and long-time user of Leatherman multitools – the inclusion of these three implements really adds to the appeal. Most notable is the ferro rod; if the worst does happen and you're stuck overnight somewhere in

HOT FEATURES SIZE AND WEIGHT TOOL VARIETY FUNCTIONALITY

an emergency and need some warmth/fire, the ferro rod is a great backup to your always-packed set of waterproof matches.

The Signal belies its compact size when it comes to being easily manipulated by someone with larger hands. Leatherman does make more compact multitools, but with the Signal's cut-away construction keeping its weight down, it maintains a far more accessible size, which in turn means the blades are larger and more robust (the blade length is 69mm).

Funnily enough (well, for this tester, anyway) out of all the easily accessed tools on the Signal, it is actually the hammer that has come in handiest. Provided you are accurate with your hammering action (keep an eye on your target, not your fingers), you will be surprised just how effective this seemingly basic tool is.

While the Signal does not signal a reinvention of the multitool, the addition of a few carefully considered (and welcome) tools to its spec list, combined with the robust construction and impressive weight, has ensured it has already become a must-pack in my bag.



HOT
FEATURES

UNIQUE DESIGN
HARNESS SYSTEM
BUILD QUALITY

TESTED // CAMELBAK SKYLINE

RRP \$179.95 www.camelbak.com

Tested by JUSTIN WALKER

THE HYDRATION PACK has become ubiquitous in mountain biking. Even if you favour frame-mounted bottles as your hydration source of choice, for those bigger riding adventures (full day or multiday), nothing beats a back-mounted pack with a hydration bladder, for both convenience when you're on the bike and for its ability to also lug additional gear (spare tube, pump, etc.)

CamelBak, the company that originally developed the hydration pack, has now fine-tuned its design in a new model called the Skyline, in which the water bladder has been relocated to improve comfort and ease of carrying.

The theory goes that by lowering the centre

of gravity of the load inside the pack, the Skyline brings that weight down to the rider's lumbar region, where it is more easily carried. This also improves the ventilation in the upper section of the pack and allows for more storage space above the bladder – 7L in fact – so you can pack lighter, bulkier items, such as rain jackets and spares more easily. The Skyline even comes with a tool roll and a small zipped pocket on the front adds even more storage.

The Skyline fits comfortably around your back; it's contoured, well-padded shoulder straps (and sternum strap) combine with a nicely padded waist belt to, literally, hug your hips. The included bladder is a 3L jobbie, so there's ample hydration onboard, and the hose can be easily switched to whichever shoulder strap you prefer it to sit. It also neatly clips on to the strap via a cool magnetic clip.

One other very welcome feature in this pack is its compression system: basically, two pull cords on each side can be used to cinch in the bladder close to your back so it doesn't feel like it is flopping around when you are riding. Other cool features include the two hooks that you can use to carry your bike helmet, and the zip



pocket and pouch on the waist belt.

For something so simple, the CamelBak Skyline offers plenty of complexity – thankfully all of which is well thought out to work as it is designed to in the field.

TESTED // THULE PRORIDE 598

RRP \$299 (silver); \$329 (black – available April)
www.thule.com.au

Tested by JUSTIN WALKER

THULE'S PRORIDE 591 roof-mounted bike carrier has been around for a while now, and has been hugely popular with those riders who prefer their rigs transported up top, and who appreciate the 591's excellent engineering and ease of use. So you'd wonder what could be improved; or you would have done until now, with the release of the 591's successor, the ProRide 598.

Thule realised that the 591 was close to perfect

HOT FEATURES
 TORQUE LIMITER
 LIGHT WEIGHT
 LOCKING SYSTEM

for transporting bikes so set about improving the bike carrier only where the company's engineers thought it may need it. The key difference between this new 598 and the previous model is the revisions to the frame holder: the "claw" and the locking mechanism have both been tweaked to provide an even more secure fit, and better frame protection.

One of the main beefs bike owners have with frame-holding bike carriers is the perception (or fear) that the claw could damage the bike frame's downtube – most notably in relation to carbon-fibre frames – if it was over-tensioned. Thule has incorporated a torque-limiter dial to ensure that there's no chance of over-tightening (it emits a "click" when optimum tension is achieved) and potentially damaging the frame at the connection point. The claw itself has also been reshaped – more like a "G" than a "C" – to aid in both positioning the bike when fitting it to the 598, and also for a more secure grip on

the bike, while spreading the pressure of the claw as it is tightened around the downtube.

All this makes loading and securing any bike (the 598 can fit any bike up to 20kg in weight, with a maximum 3-inch tyre width) a doddle; even loading up my hefty steel-framed Niner ROS 9 was no problem. The process itself is simple: you simply lift up the frame-holder arm to an "open" angled position, then lift your bike up and lean it into the frame-holder claw's extended lower section, which hooks the bike and stops it from falling over. This supports the bike while you align the front/rear wheels and tighten them down. You can then tighten the claw via the torque-limiter dial. That's the order in which I did it in, but you could just as easily tighten the frame-holder claw on the down tube first, then tie the wheels down. That's the benefit of having the bike sitting up there, held in position by the frame-holder.

Other tweaks to the 598 include the interesting approach of diagonal front and rear wheel straps, the reasoning being a diagonal strap effectively covers or holds more of the wheel – and these straps also feature a new ratcheting system, which is smooth in use and locks the wheels in securely. And

speaking of security, Thule's "secure locking system" features two locks: one locks the 598 bike carrier to your vehicle's roof rails; the other locks the frame-holder claw itself. One other cool feature of the 598 is that it can be mounted on either side of your vehicle without needing specific tools to move it.

I have had the 598 on test for a month now and am stoked with how its performance. The whole bike fitment process – from mounting to dismounting – is very easy and stress-free with the 598 and, even though it is not the cheapest bike carrier around, with all its improvements and the fact it keeps your bike secure and damage-free, it's a premium worth paying.





TESTED // GARMIN FORERUNNER 25 GEAR TEST

RRP \$299 RRP \$219.00 www.garmin.com.au

Tested by LAUREN SMITH

KNOWN FOR ADDICTION to wearable activity trackers, I was keen to take the Garmin Forerunner 25 for, well, a run. Pairing it with a Garmin Soft Strap Premium Heart Rate Monitor, I used the devices to track my regular 10km run home from the office, as well as a few longer weekend treks.

I was soon impressed with the clean, simple interface. Pairing the devices and syncing them with my smartphone was an easy job and I was ready to go within minutes. The watch is slightly bigger than some other wearables, but it's extremely light, weighing less than 40g, and waterproof – perfect for a run to the beach followed by a swim. It's also easy to figure out how to navigate through the menu, with four simple buttons – a light, a back button, a button for starting a run and a scrolling/select button.

The Forerunner 25 nails all of the basic functions with style, tracking daily steps and counting burnt calories, and it even has an algorithm for setting auto-goals for daily steps

as it learns your general activity level. When you sync with a phone through the Garmin Connect app, you can do even more: track your runs on a map, compare laps and add extra activities for a more thorough diary. You can even cross-reference the data with calorie-counting or other health apps.

The watch also offers Smart Notifications, so that text messages, emails and phone calls pop up on the screen. You can elect to read the message or take the call, or ignore them until later. As someone who's often checking emails on the go, I really appreciated that I could control my interruptions better, being able to look at my wrist and decide what was worth stopping for.

The training mode, which lets you track a particular run, is easy to start and stop – so easy that sometimes I officially 'ended' a run far before I meant to, leaving me with a few runs that looked like I'd stopped and caught a bus as a halfway break, before realising and switching

the training mode back on. You can tab through the screens quickly, checking on pace, heart rate and distance.

The functionality on offer at this price point is great – nearly half the price of some comparable products in the crowded wearables market. With the Forerunner I was able to dig deeper into the data – managing my lap times a little more closely even helped me take some time off my 10km run, getting me home from work faster.



THE PADDLING ISSUE

Where: Mushroom Rapid on the North Johnstone River, Queensland
Photographer: James McCormack
www.actiongoat.com

WITH BROILING CLASS V rapids and four days of paddling through World Heritage wilderness, Queensland's mighty North Johnstone River offers one of Australia's most challenging and beautiful rafting trips. The river is steep and technical and the scenery amazing as you float past walls of pristine jungle and waterfalls leap from above. Oh, and the water is warm; something you won't find at many other rafting destinations.

"We'd hit bigger and more technical rapids higher up in the North Johnstone," says snapper James McCormack, "but it was the final Class V rapid, Mushroom, that caused the most grief."

Sadly, due to access and insurance issues, commercial operations on the NJ were suspended a year ago. Prior operator RnR Rafting believes sufficient demand might see it reopen in the future, but until then it can still be run privately.

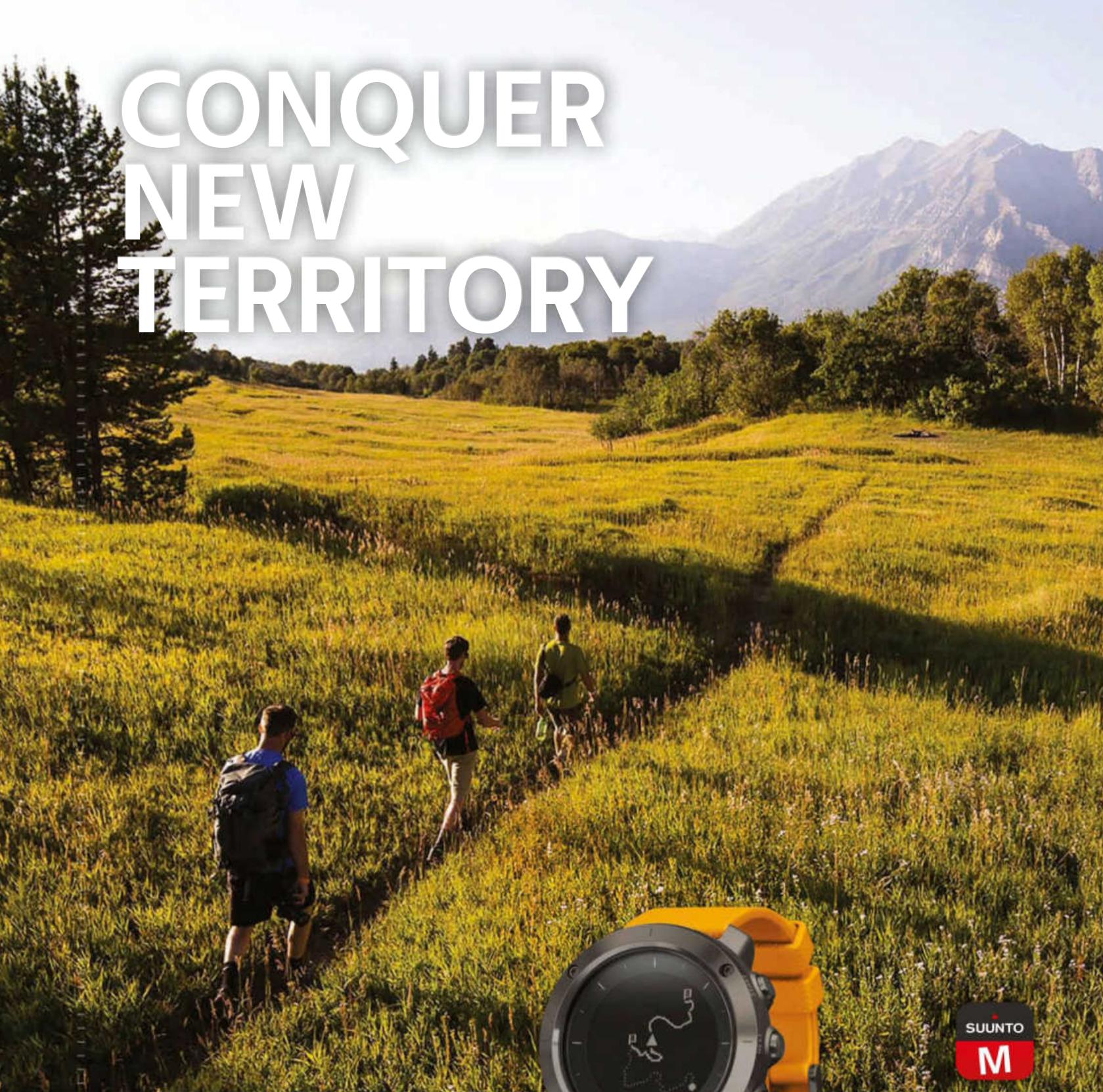


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Send it to us with "Last Shot" in the subject line to
outdoor@bauer-media.com.au

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NEXT ISSUE Mar-April// ON SALE 17 March

CONQUER NEW TERRITORY



SUUNTO
M

Free Suunto Movescount App - learn
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movescountapp](http://suunto.com/movescountapp)

SUUNTO TRAVERSE GO EXPLORE

Curiosity drives us to seek out and discover new places, but it's the confidence of finding our way that encourages us to step off the beaten path. Suunto Traverse is your ideal companion on trails in the bush. Plan your route in Movescount.com with topographic maps and stay on course with the GPS/GLONASS navigation. The powerful battery of Suunto Traverse keeps you exploring hour after hour.

 **SUUNTO**

SEATOSUMMIT

solution gear



*Where is your next
SUP adventure
taking you?*



SUP XT Cart



SUP Soft Roof Racks



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